

The Lost Stories of Warwick Deeping

Volumes I-IX

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VOLUME FOUR

THE LOST STORIES OF WARWICK DEEPING

SORRELL *plays*



'Sorrell smiled at him. 'Hope you are quite comfortable, sir.' Mr. Baskervill glared a 'Who the devil are you?''

A JUNE day after heavy wind and rain, with the sun shining upon a wet and glistening world. Sorrell, buttoning up an old brown mackintosh, and with a hank of bass in one pocket, went out to rescue some of his delphiniums which had suffered from the wind and rain.

Many of the blue spires were leaning this way and that, and, touching them with long and sensitive fingers of his, he may have thought how much more strange was all this wet and sun-splashed beauty than the life of a hotel.

Yet, he of all men knew that strange things happen in hotels, for to these caravansaries gather people who are restless and unhappy, lonely people, homeless people, victims of the sex adventure.

Hidden behind a sheaf of dark-blue larkspur, he heard himself hailed.

"You there, sir?"

It was the voice of Hulks, the Pelican's head porter, who had succeeded to Sorrell's shoes; a Hulks who was growing a little more stout and stately. In the days that were past he and Sorrell had handled luggage together, but that did not prevent Hulks from calling Sorrell "sir."

"I'm over here, Albert. Anything wrong?"

The responsibilities of a *hôte* may be at times of a somewhat delicate texture, and Hulks had orders to report to his manager anything that was unusual. Hulks came across the little lawn where the old apple trees grew, and his official coat matched some of the larkspur petals.

"Rather a queer party just pulled in, sir."

Sorrell had a length of bass looped round a sheaf of stems, and he knotted it off.

"Staying?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Marks has put 'em in No. 3."

"Just how queer, Bert?"

"A flashy two-seater, sir, and a flashy gent who might be Buck's younger brother, and a lady."

"Nothing very unusual, Bert."

"Well, the lady was blubbing, sir."

Sorrell straightened his long back, and drew out another strand of bass from his coat pocket.

"Have they registered?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Baskervill."

"Where from?"

"Just London, sir."

"What's your idea, Bert?"

Hulks had a pretty shrewd appreciation of life as viewed from the porter's desk of a hotel.

"A mock honeymoon, sir. Gent's suitcase solid yellow

leather; the lady's—fiber, and not so very new at that. Besides——"

"Besides what, Bert?"

"Well, sir, she looks scared, sir, like a woman who has taken the train and wished she hadn't. What's more, the fellow looks like butcher's meat, and pretty raw at that."

Sorrell came out from the border onto the grass, and his eyes seemed to be gazing at some picture out of the past.

"Where are they now, Bert?"

"In the lounge, sir. The gent had ordered tea."

"I'll come and have a look at them."

Sorrell could observe the lounge from the glass window of the reception office. The Baskervills were in the far left-hand corner, but sufficiently near for him to observe their faces. The woman was a pretty, dark thing; the man one of those big, blond beasts who run to bulk and belly.

He sat solidly in his club chair munching bread and butter. It was obvious to Sorrell that the woman was frightened of him, and that their mutual adventure, whatever it was, had encountered rough weather.

The man passed his empty cup to his companion.

"Feeling better? Yes, another cup, please."

She did not reply. Her hand was so unsteady that she upset the empty cup. The man looked annoyed.

"Pull yourself together. Yes, two lumps. You ought to know that by now."

Sorrell had come to realize that a man can look at a woman in various ways, as he looks at a nice child or a dear comrade, or as he might contemplate a dish of fruit or a pork chop. Baskervill's eyes were offensively greedy. They seemed to emit a blue and devouring glare.

"I may as well send that wire."

SHE looked at him appealingly. Her face suggested to Sorrell a frightened, dark pansy, for to him there was a likeness between the faces of some women and of flowers.

"No, please give me a little time——"

"Look here; no use funking. You've done the thing."

"But——"

He smiled at her with sensual and truculent amorousness. "Much better make it final. Fact is some of you women have to have your minds made up. I'll do it."

He rose, and she, too, half rose from her chair.

"Bob—please."

"Sit down. We can't mess about like this."

Baskervill crossed the lounge to the office, and Sorrell slipped aside through the office door. He heard Baskervill

ask the girl clerk for a telegram form and a pencil. The message was written. Baskervill's voice was curt.

"I want this sending at once."

"It will have to go into Winstonbury, sir."

"All right. Send a page in on a bike. At once—you understand?"

"Quite, sir."

Directly Baskervill's back was turned Sorrell stepped back into the office and picked up the telegram.

"The gentleman seems in a hurry, Miss Page. I'm going into Winstonbury. I'll send it."

He stood by the window of the passage leading to his private room and read Mr. Baskervill's wire:

John Ransford

3 Holly Terrace

Highbury.

Kitty with me here. Take what action you please.

Baskervill.

The Pelican Inn

Winstonbury.

SORRELL folded the form in half and folded it again. He slipped it into his pocket. So that was the situation, and he—as a man—had once been thrust against the thorns of just such a tragedy. He knew its bitterness and its pathos, the urge of some fatal impulse, passion, or pique flying like a moth at a candle. He had put that telegram in his pocket. He would forget to send it at all events until to-morrow.

Those who worked with him and for Sorrell at the Pelican were most of them like old friends. He could confide in them. They understood that half whimsical look in his eyes when he gave them a delicate hint as to the handling of some particular cat's cradle.

He would use a particular phrase on such occasions. "Go gently with No. 7." The hotel had to protect itself against uncomfortable entanglements. And in this case he spoke to Mrs. Marks and Hulks and Fanny Garland. His orders to Hulks were both significant and prophetic.

"Bert, tell Chase to have that two-seater well blocked in at the back of the garage."

Hulks smiled.

"Right, sir. I'll see she's blocked in."

Mr. Baskervill dressed for dinner. The lady did not. In fact she remained in the lounge and still wearing her hat, as though No. 3 were an ogre's den and she a child suddenly afraid of being trapped in it.

In the dining room Fanny Garland—more efficient than any male *maitre d'hôtel*—gave them a table by one of the garden windows. Mr. Baskervill ordered champagne. Obviously both the adventure and the lady needed it if the sacrificial rite was to be consummated.

Lancelot

WARWICK
DEEPING'S

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new story of romance and modern chivalry*

Illustration by KARL GODWIN

"Now, then, Kit, what about it?"
She began turning the pages of that
journal.

"It's quite early——"

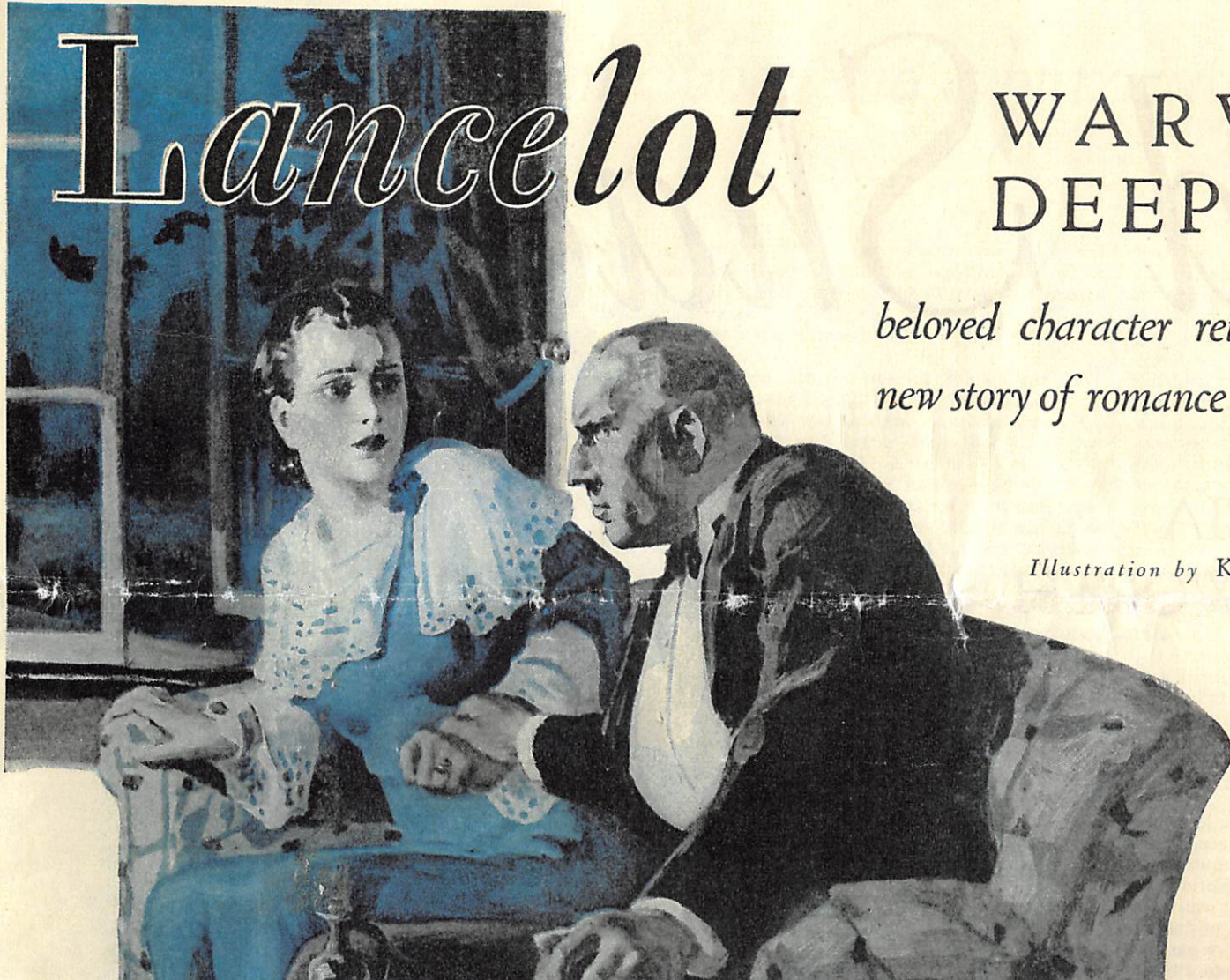
"Now, look here; come to bed and
be—sensible."

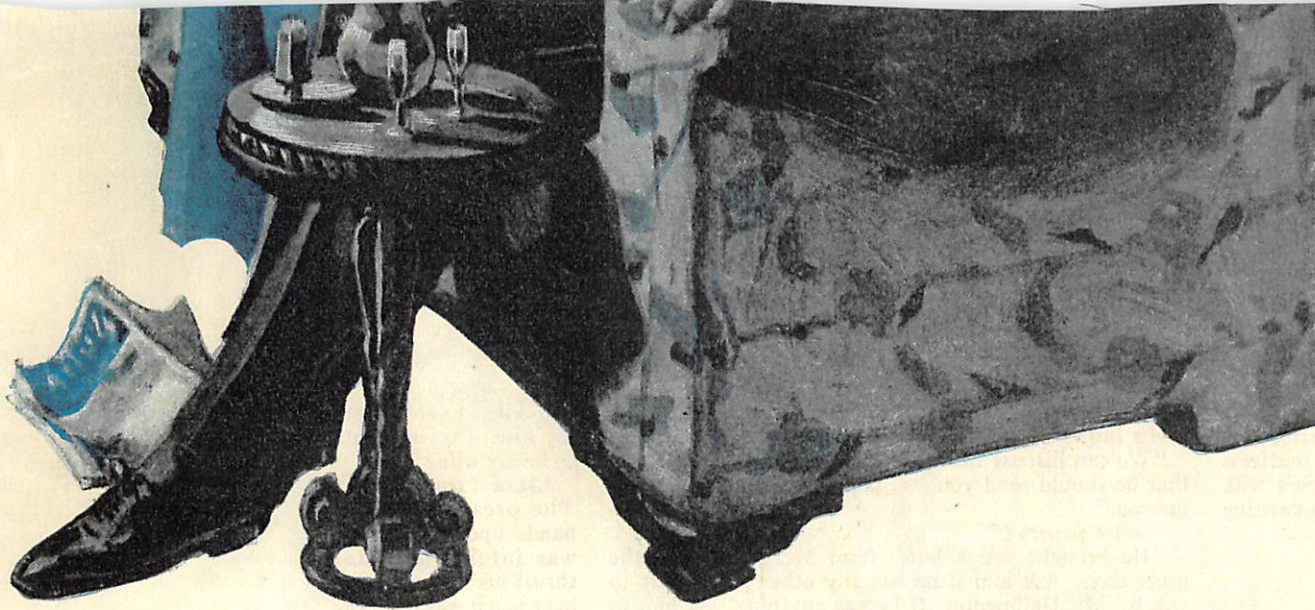
She sat rigid.

"I—I—can't——"

He leaned forward suddenly and
plucked the magazine out of her hands.
He smiled, a kind of fat, suborning
smile.

"You've looked at that blamed thing
for an hour. Come on; we're in it to—





He grasped her by the wrist, and she resisted.

"No, please——"

SORRELL appeared in the lounge with an air of aloof innocence. He saw Mr. Baskervill's hand loosen its grip and withdraw itself. "Oh, hang the fellow!" That was what Mr. Baskervill's blue eyes said; and Sorrell picked up a copy of an evening paper. He smiled at Baskervill over the top of a page.

"Hope you are quite comfortable, sir."

Mr. Baskervill glared a "Who the devil are you?"

"I'm the manager, sir. I like to know that my clients are comfortable."

Mr. Baskervill rose, pulled down his waistcoat, and moved toward the stairs.

"Quite—thanks."

He turned at the foot of the stairs and looked at the woman.

"Don't be long, my dear. The drive's made me sleepy."

Now, Stephen Sorrell might be a little unusual both as a hotel manager and as a man, but if he chose to sit

down and read the paper in the lounge of the hotel that he managed, who was to gainsay him?

He was so much aware of that pretty, pathetic, frightened little person who had fluttered off upon this adventure and was finding her wings faltering. What was her trouble? Had she had a row with her husband? Was she the victim of some deplorably dull marriage, and been discovered and hunted by this handsome bully of a male?

Sex was a sort of blindness. In fact, it was so much like a debauch—and the afterwards— Yes, he knew all about the afterwards. He had reached an age when a man can reflect calmly upon such a situation and feel compassionate and kindly amused.

Besides, this little creature was not made for so strenuous and turbulent an affair. She was not one of those who could shrug her shoulders and strike a bargain with fate when the adventure became a sour and sordid reality. For that was the end of most of these excursions.

Please turn to page 55

"Now, then, drink some of that. Do you good." She refused the champagne, though he filled her glass, and was heavily and ominously playful.

"A little bit of devil; that's what you want, my dear." She looked more like weeping over the fish.

"Bob, I want to go home."

Well, really! He had every right to be exasperated.

"Don't you realize that I have sent that telegram? We've gone in off the deep end together."

"I asked you to wait."

"Now, for pity's sake, don't make a scene here. Haven't I done everything that's possible?"

Sorrell was dining in his private room, and to him Fanny Garland went and reported. As a woman she was wise as to the attributes of the dominant and oversexed male. The gentleman had prepared himself for a festival, and the occasion was presenting him with tears and remorse on a cold plate.

"Well, Fanny?"

"The gent ordered champagne; she hasn't touched it."

"I see."

"He's a bully. The kind of man who expects a woman to behave like—well, perhaps you know what I mean?"

"Thanks, Fanny. Yes, I think I know what you mean."

AFTER dinner Mr. Baskervill ordered liqueurs and coffee in the lounge, and lit a cigar and fumed behind it like a heated substance that was denied the right of self-expression. His companion refused a liqueur. She sat turning the pages of an illustrated magazine, and when she had exhausted and reëxhausted the pictures, she sought refuge in the letterpress. She was both agitated and still, and her stillness had the palsy of panic.

Sorrell, in and out of the office, kept watch upon the crisis. It was nearing its climax, and if interference was possible he meant to supply it.

People drifted off to bed, and presently the lounge was empty save for those two. The man was growing impatient and restless, though making an obvious effort to humor the occasion. He yawned. He became clumsily playful.

Was she conscious of his interest in her? She was still fluttering the pages of the magazine. She seemed to emit agitated rustlings. Then she rose, threw the magazine on a table, and went to one of the lounge windows. It was shut, and she made as though to open it.

Sorrell jumped up.

"Would you like it open?"

"Please."

"It is rather hot to-night."

"Oh, very."

HE SAW a full moon shining, and so did she. The soft air flowed in with a scent of honeysuckle.

"By the way, Madam, if you care to go into the garden for a little while. Some people do, you know, at night. We leave the door open—till the last thing."

She turned and looked at him for a moment, and then her glance lighted on a table upon which were arranged time-tables, a copy of Bradshaw, and a few guidebooks. She moved toward the table, picked up the Bradshaw, opened it, and then, with a kind of gesture of "Oh, what's the use?" put it down again.

Suddenly she spoke. "I suppose it's too late to send a telegram."

"Telegram? Well—yes. Good Heavens, that reminds me—"

He felt in his pocket and produced a piece of paper. He showed it to her.

"I'm most terribly sorry, Madam. Oh, my wretched memory! Your—husband—wanted this wire sending. I was going to give it to the porter—and forgot."

He was aware of her face like still water suddenly animated by a wind.

"You didn't send it?"

"No. I shall have to apologize."

She sank into a chair. She seemed to be drawing deep breaths. "Oh, don't do that—please. You see—"

"Shall I give you the form?"

He passed it to her. She took it, crumpled it, and sat with closed eyes, the piece of crumpled paper pressed between her hands.

SORRELL PLAYS LANCELOT

Continued from page 15

afraid that Baskerville would descend upon her.

"My suitcase! I shall have to leave it!"

"We'll send it on to you. I think you had better wait in my office until the car is ready."

She looked relieved. "Yes, he might come down. I don't want to see him again."

Sorrell took her to his sitting room and rang for Hulks, who had been warned to remain on duty. He gave Hulks his orders and an explanation of them. "Tell Chase to get the car out at once. Yes, I'm going with the lady. I want you to deal with the gentleman, Bert, if he should come down and make trouble."

Chase, the Pelican garageman and chauffeur, had the car ready in ten minutes. Sorrell had collected a spare overcoat of his own and he slipped it over Kitty Ransford's shoulders. He took her down to the garage yard, where the car was waiting.

Hulks stood in the hotel doorway and watched the headlights of the car light up the trunks of the old elms lining the road. The red tail-light disappeared, and Hulks then lit a cigarette and inhaled the smoke. Great man—Mr. Sorrell! He was closing the glass doors when he became aware of a figure in a bright-blue dressing gown and purple pajamas.

"Hallo, Porter."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm looking for a lady."

Hulks was bland and politely stupid.

"A lady, sir?"

"Yes."

"Everybody's gone to bed, sir."

Mr. Baskerville was seeing red. According to his lights, and they were rather lurid ones, he was justified in feeling savage.

"I left the lady downstairs in the lounge."

Hulks looked round the lounge as though he expected to find some one hiding behind a chair. "Well, she isn't here, sir."

"Hang it, I have eyes. Where is she?"

Mr. Baskerville arrived with his very yellow suitcase, an overcoat, and two rugs.

"I've left a fiver in the bedroom. Come on, man; haven't you—?"

"Better go back to bed, sir. Your car's boxed in."

"Come on, help me move these cars."

"Sorry, sir, against orders."

"Orders! Whose orders?"

"The management's, sir. The garage attendant is responsible for all cars. We're not allowed to interfere with them."

Mr. Baskerville produced a pound note.

"Here. Take this. Get busy."

Hulks put his hands in his pockets.

"Sorry, sir, nothing doing. Better go back to bed."

Mr. Baskerville had been drinking. He was one of those men who never travel without a bottle of whisky, and three stiff whiskies after champagne and a double liqueur are not good even for the silkier of souls. Baskerville in an alcoholic rage was a creature to whom self-restraint was no better than a ragged shirt. He shouted at the porter.

"It's a put-up job! You move those cars!"

"Nothing doing, sir."

"You're a lot of dirty swine! Here, get out of the way!"

For Hulks had rolled the doors to and was locking them. He turned on the bully.

"What do you call me, sir?"

"I called you a—"

"You go to—black—sir. If you want a rough-house—your way or mine. And that's that."

Tailored by

THE full moon appeared to be waiting.

That car hurrying along the Long Road, 6223, on a road. The night was quiet, with little traffic, and Chase drove fast. To begin with, Kitty Ransford sat huddled up in her corner, and Sorrell's silence was like the night, gentle and consoling, and presently his companion came out of her frightened stupor and spoke to him.

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piece of gossip. Dare he intervene and draw gently at the thread? He hesitated, and, walking to the window, stood looking at the moon.

"What a wonderful night! It always strikes me as strange that the old moon is shining here for us and for other people—too." He heard or rather felt her move in her chair.

"The same moon."

"Yes—I suppose—in London. After all we are only seventy miles from London."

She was on her feet now, confronting him and her crisis.

"Did you read that telegram?"

"Yes."

"How dared you?"

"I checked it, Madam. A telegram may mean nothing to the manager of a hotel."

She was suffering intense emotion. One hand still clutched that piece of paper.

"I see. May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Would it be possible for me—to get back—"

She faltered, and he fathered the impulse.

"To London? Of course. The trains are awkward, but the hotel has a car. It's at your service."

And suddenly she broke down. She hid her face in a cushion and her shoulders quivered. For a moment Sorrell watched her, and then he went close and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"I'll order the car at once, Mrs. Ransford."

She started up. "How do you know?"

"Forgive me. That telegram. Shall I order the car?"

"Oh, please, yes—at once—before—"

"May I come with you and the chauffeur?"

"You?"

"As a friend."

She looked at him with her dark, childish eyes. "You are being very kind to me. How much shall I owe for the car?"

"No need to worry about that. We'll send you a bill some time later."

She kept glancing at the stairs. She was

"She hasn't gone out, has she?"

Hulks's face became suddenly intelligent.

"Wait a bit, sir. Of course. You're the gentleman who arrived to-day in the two-seater."

"I did."

"Oh, well, the lady has left, sir."

"Left?"

"By car."

"My car?"

"Oh, no, sir, the hotel car."

"Where for?"

"I don't know, sir."

Mr. Baskerville swore.

"When did she leave?"

"Oh, about an hour ago, sir. Or—it might be fifty minutes. I'm not quite sure."

Mr. Baskerville fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown, but there was no money in that pocket.

"Look here—I want my car at once. Go down and tell the garageman to get it out."



"The garageman has gone with the hotel car, sir."

"Hang it, I want my car! Go and unlock the garage. I'll be there in ten minutes."

He floundered up the stairs, and Hulks, with a smile on his face, went down to the garage, unlocked the doors, rolled them back, and switched on the lights. Yes, Chase had carried out his orders most thoroughly. The two-seater was blockaded in a far corner behind half a dozen large cars and half a dozen small fry. The two-seater was there for the night.

"About half past eleven, I think."

"I'm keeping you up—awfully late."

"Don't worry about me. I have a son in town. I shall ring him up, and he'll give me a shakedown for the night."

She said, "Oh, I've been an awful fool. You wouldn't believe—I hope it's not too late."

"Usually it takes two fools to make a mess of life and to make it up again. I was a fool once, but the other person wasn't sufficiently foolish. I think we shall be—in Highbury soon after half past twelve."

She shivered slightly.

"He may be waiting up. Supposing—I can't make any one hear?"

"I think we shall manage that."

The car cruised along Holly Terrace about a quarter to one, and when they reached the last few houses Kitty Ransford sat forward and gazed at the windows.

"Tell him to stop, please."

Sorrell rapped on the glass partition.

"Oh, there's a light in the dining room!"

When Sorrell opened the door for her she slipped out and past him and up the path to the door of No. 3. It was an early Victorian house, flat and correct, with iron railings and a privet hedge. Sorrell stood by the car. Kitty Ransford had rung the bell, and Sorrell saw the door opened by a man.

"Oh, Jack, I've been such a fool!"

Sorrell turned away. He had seen enough to assure him that Jack Ransford was capable of being equally and humanly foolish. There was the murmur of their voices, intimate and fond like a twittering of birds after a storm. Well, perhaps their particular storm had passed off and they would be the wiser for it.

He heard a flutter of footsteps coming down the path. She ran out to him.

"Oh, I forgot! Your coat. Oh, thank you—"

Her face was a wet radiance, and as he took the coat from her she put up a shy face and kissed him.



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JULY 1984

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She expected to be kissed and he did not kiss her.

"I've just seen your husband."

Then she understood. "He hasn't been to you?"

Marlow nodded.

The Love Story of CHERRY

By

WARWICK DEEPING

CHERRY ORCHARDSON was ten when both her parents died of Spanish influenza, and Richard Marlow came back from the war to other devastations.

Marlow and Orchardson had been partners in a fruit farm and market garden not twenty miles from town, but poor Orchardson, with his passion for pure science, had let the business slip through his long and sensitive fingers, and Marlow had found himself left with debts, a derelict concern, and his partner's child.

Being the sort of man he was, he had accepted both debts and adopted daughter. He had taken off his tunic and got to work in his shirt-sleeves.

He did not marry, for the girl who was to have married him had surrendered herself to someone else, and Marlow was not a man who forgot.

He was both hard up and hard bitten, but he was made of the stuff that has both imagination and can take risks. Moreover, he had Cherry, and Cherry was a lovable child who seemed to find it easy to attach herself to Uncle Dick.

They lived in a cottage together in Lavender Lane, where Burfleet touched the Thames. A queer little lump of an old woman named Betsy Bragg acted as general servant. Marlow sent Cherry to school at an establishment in Burfleet where she wore a kind of green school uniform, and the green of it set off her amber hair.

BUT if Burfleet thought that it had Richard Marlow labelled and pigeon-holed, Burfleet had no imagination, for Marlow was a plunger, but a plunger who came up with the gold coin between his teeth. He had very strong, white teeth, a level smile, and quiet, blue eyes.

Life could not rattle him.

The market garden ceased to be derelict—but it was only an adjunct. Someone built a large, new, up-to-date garage in Burfleet. Someone put upon the road a number of buses that plied from the station to the river. Someone bought up Burfleet Place when old Shandon died, and began to develop and to build.

The Love Story of Cherry

Mr. Richard Marlow was the creator of all these activities, and if Burfleet wondered how Marlow raised the money it was made to realise that Mr. Richard Marlow had a genius for making money.

He built himself a house in Burfleet Park, with a hard tennis court, a dance-room, and a garage for three cars. At the age of forty-two he was a person in Burfleet. Friends tried to persuade him to become chairman of the local Urban District Council, but Mr. Richard Marlow had too many other things to care for and do.

IN the first place, he had Cherry. For a number of years she had lived with him as his daughter, and had grown up into the likeness of a daughter. The relationship was accepted by both of them with the unquestioning reasonableness of habit. Moreover, it was probable that Marlow did not realise how much his life centred round this quick-coloured, bright-haired child. The envious said that he spoilt her, but Cherry was difficult to spoil.

She was a passionate child, quick, vivid, impulsive.

"Don't scold me, nunky—I can't bear it. When I've been a fool, I know it. No need to rub it in."

Marlow never rubbed it in and never asked her fussy questions. The girl had a right to a soul of her own, and in leaving her free he kept her as a comrade.

And a delightful comrade she was—good to watch, good to be with.

"They say you spoil me, nunky."

"And who are they?"

"The nice people we call candid friends."

"Well, I suppose I shall go on spoiling you. I don't see any signs of dry-rot."

They could laugh at things together, for she was wise for her age and quick in her perceptions, and had an eye for a snob or a humbug. Almost they talked a language of their own, for if Cherry was mature for her years, Marlow had much of the boy in him.

When Cherry was seventeen Marlow was forty-two, and on her seventeenth birthday he gave her a car of her own, a beautiful little blue *de-luxe coupé*.

"Now, don't put the wind up me. She's fast, you know."

Her dark eyes were gay.

"I say, isn't she lovely?"

Cherry flashed through Burfleet in her blue two-seater. She bathed, she danced, played tennis, and did all these things very well; and certain prudish busybodies began to chatter: "Marlow and that big girl living together. Daughter! He ought to have a responsible person in the house."

Had Marlow heard these criticisms the soul of him would have been profoundly shocked and angered. His consciousness was still full of Cherry the child.

But he was no fool. Young men began to come to the house; lads accompanied their sisters. They played on Marlow's tennis court and danced in his dance-room. He watched them with level, disinterested eyes.

He said to himself: "Yes, of course, some day she'll marry."

But he supposed that the day was still a long way off, and that Cherry would be Cherry for some years yet. Moreover, when she did marry, he was sure that her choice would be reasonably wise and that she would not waste herself upon some thing of straw. He wanted her to see something of life and of men before she married. He was frank with her.

"No hurry, kid. The first time you drive a new car you think it the most wonderful car in the world. It isn't. Dozens more like it."

She laughed.

"When I think of marrying, nunky, we'll have a parade and you shall select the candidate."

IT did not happen in that way, and shortly after Cherry's twentieth birthday Marlow noticed that a particular young man was coming very often to the house. His name was Philip Fream, nor was he the sort of young man who would have attracted Marlow's attention or have suggested that he was of any romantic significance. Cherry called him Pip, and to Marlow he was a pip-squeak.

He was a rather meagre, tallish youth, with a poor little head and one of those inadequate and pasty faces. He wore spectacles. He carried about him a kind of perpetual smirk. He chattered.

He seemed to regard it as a funny affair, and his rather prominent nose was fun at it, and was

But Mr. Philip the world was a young person. He of terms and was an excellent dancer, ordinate post in in Throgmorton temporaries he r "The Old Lad." Marlow spoke t Fream.

"You seem to kid. What's his

Cherry answered "Oh, he's t dancer! And h sticky time."

"How?" "Lost his pare dragged him up. mean—"

Marlow laughed "Nothing pers

But he began and his dancing self-assured face, anything in the that justified a th things had stand

It struck Marlow ridiculously and with himself. F slyness.

"Oh, nothing

That is what for it seemed to that this pip-sq thing to Cherry He did not know nor did Cherry herself. Young to her as he a danced well, he homeless sort c digs, and wa plucky and Cherry was mo conceit disguise He had had no made the best

As for young in love with C love with any smirking self.

He seemed to regard life as a vastly funny affair, and he nibbled at it with his rather prominent teeth, and poked fun at it, and was full of persiflage.

But Mr. Philip Fream as a man of the world was peculiarly complacent young person. He played a fair game of tennis and was supposed to be an exquisite dancer, and held some subordinate post in a stockbroker's office in Throgmorton Street. To his contemporaries he referred to Marlow as "The Old Lad."

Marlow spoke to Cherry about young Fream.

"You seem to be seeing a lot of him, kid. What's his job in life?"

Cherry answered brightly:

"Oh, he's the most marvellous dancer! And he has had rather a sticky time."

"How?"

"Lost his parents. A stuffy old uncle dragged him up. Oh, nunky, I don't mean—"

Marlow laughed.

"Nothing personal."

But he began to observe Mr. Fream and his dancing and his bright, little self-assured face, nor could he discover anything in the young man's dancing that justified a thrill. But, then, young things had standards of their own.

It struck Marlow that the lad was ridiculously and preposterously pleased with himself. His smirk had a certain slyness.

"Oh, nothing serious!"

That is what Marlow said to himself, for it seemed to him utterly improbable that this pip-squeak could mean anything to Cherry. But he was wrong. He did not know the whole of his Cherry, nor did Cherry know the whole of herself. Young Fream did not appear to her as he appeared to Marlow. He danced well, he was amusing, he was a homeless sort of creature who lived in digs, and was—she thought—rather plucky and *gaillard*. Something in Cherry was moved to mother him. His conceit disguised itself as cheerfulness. He had had no one to help him, and he made the best of the show.

As for young Fream, he was as much in love with Cherry as he could be in love with anything outside his little, smirking self. His Narcissus cult might

have appeared fantastic. Older men would have said: "What the little monkey has to be so pleased about passes my comprehension," but as a matter of fact older men were hardly aware of Philip Fream. He was just a monkey, but in his way a clever little monkey.

That was the trouble.

HIS assurance was extraordinary. He said to some kindred spirit in the train: "When I marry Cherry the old stuffer will cough up something."

And that was Marlow's problem. He was confronted with the unexpected. Cherry engaged herself to Philip Fream, and she was incredibly serious about it.

Marlow, amazed and a little shocked, held himself in.

"Quite sure about things, kid?"

Of course she was sure. Philip had much more in him than appeared. He was clever and, with someone to back him, he would do big things. Philip had not had a fair chance, and she—Cherry—was going to help him to do big things. If he were made a member of the Stock Exchange he would be able to show the world what he could do. Yes, Pip was perfectly marvellous with figures; she was sure that he had a flair for finance.

Marlow bit hard at his pipe-stem.

"Well, it's your show, Cherry. I'll back it."

She ran and kissed him.

"You're such a dear! You've always been such a dear!"

Somehow that kiss of hers hurt Marlow. There was a strangeness and an ardour in it, as though he had become conscious of Cherry the woman. He was shocked at himself.

"All right. I'll have a talk to Fream. I'll see what his ideas are."

Mr. Fream had two very definite ideas; first, that it would be pleasant to possess Cherry in the flesh; and secondly, that it would be even more pleasant to possess a portion of Mr. Marlow's fleshly prosperity. Philip Fream was the most utter little materialist and a cynic, but he had the sense to be polite to Marlow and to treat the older man with a show of respect. He did not talk too much and he put off

The Love Story of Cherry

some of his air of condescension, for this young man was one of those who, without sixpence in their pockets or an original idea in their brain-cases, are full of condescension.

He even addressed Marlow as "sir," for the old boy had to be kept in a generous temper, young Fream seeing in this forceful man of five-and-forty a potential pantaloons to be exploited.

He said:

"If I get my chance in the City, I shall know how to take it. I'm not the pet fool of the family, with a nice, lazy job waiting for him."

Marlow was not impressed. He asked to be told the amount of Philip's income, and young Fream confessed to it with scorn.

"Pretty paltry, isn't it? One can't marry on less than a thousand a year."

"I shall arrange for Cherry to have an income of her own."

Mr. Fream's bright little face sharpened.

"Very generous of you, sir. May I ask—"

"Five hundred a year—but settled on her, you understand."

The young man's face became less bright.

"Oh, we might manage on that! But if I could become a member—"

Marlow was generous. He did not even propose a period of probation, perhaps because he was acting like a fanatic towards some elemental emotion in himself. He was jealous of young Fream, and wrathful with himself for feeling jealous. He bought young Fream his chance in the City; he found them a small house at Malton, and gave them a handsome cheque towards furnishing it; he behaved like a scrupulous and magnanimous fool.

SO Philip and Cherry were married and drove off for their honeymoon in Cherry's blue car, and Marlow went back to work, and found the big house in Burfleet Park rather pretentious and empty. He missed Cherry, and he missed her not only as the child but as the woman. But that was his secret, and now that life had discovered it to him he hid it away in the depths of a fierce self-repression. To bring up a child and then to realise when you had

lost her that you were in love with the woman! Idiot! A girl of twenty and a man of forty-five!

Burfleet nodded its head.

"Marlow will get married now."

Various ladies of more mature age and not a few younger women were ready to make him happy and share his good fortune. Even when regarded as mere material man he was a catch, and Marlow was more than mere material man. He was very much male, and in the full force of his years, an interesting person, vivid, well coloured, strong, pleasant. He was known to be generous. There was nothing mean about Marlow, and to the feminine mind the generous gesture is convincing.

But Marlow did not marry. He threw himself into other financial adventures, and began to create more business and to command more money.

The Freams settled down in the Cot at Malton, and Pip travelled daily to the City in a first-class carriage and talked largely on finance, and was eyed askance by older men. His reputation as a pup increased, and had he not been known as Marlow's pet pup he would have received even less attention. But the complacency of him condescended. He was sure that he could teach all Malton how to make money.

Once a month the Freams spent a week-end with Marlow. They drove over in Cherry's car, and usually it was Philip who drove, and somehow Marlow resented seeing the young man at the wheel of Cherry's car. Moreover, he began to be aware of a change in Cherry, and at first it puzzled him. She seemed shy and self-conscious in his presence. She would begin to chatter, colour up, and become silent, or again she would be irresponsibly noisy and restless. She appeared to avoid being alone with Marlow. Her eyes had lost their innocence.

Marlow was sad. He thought: "It bores them being here. The old Cherry has gone away from me to this youngster. She can no longer talk to me or I to her."

He turned these week-ends into social affairs. He gave dances and tennis parties and ran a cocktail bar, and filled the place with people. If Cherry was lost to him, he would feel the loss less in a crowd. And always he was con-

scious of young smirking face, a to enjoy some his own.

IT happened that Marlow make a remark was not supposed to have evoked the indis-

"No, you can't go to dance with me."

"Cut it. That's all."

He's pretty foolish. Marlow, suddenly decided to go and pushed through making for the one touched his

"Nunky—you know me."

He found him eyes, and then to him. He had the contrast between her lambent hair

"Oh, go a young!"

He sneered sensitive to the

"No, I want to know that you of these lads."

He stared at surrendered.

"All right."

"Does that something else?"

They danced a desperate secret that was of Cherry's

sad. She died all through the strange feeling moving with

Just before spoke.

"Nunky, you one day."

"My dear—"

"Yes, alone."

But their more. Marlow hurt in him.

"Come over."

"Yes, next."

She came in

scious of young Fream's bright little smirking face, a futile face that seemed to enjoy some eternally silly joke of his own.

IT happened at one of these parties that Marlow heard young Fream make a remark that the older man was not supposed to hear. A girl provoked the indiscretion.

"No, you can't have this one. I've got to dance with Mr. Marlow."

"Cut it. The old boy won't notice. He's pretty footling on his feet."

Marlow, suddenly red about the ears, decided to forget that dance. He pushed through the crowd, and was making for the card-room, when someone touched his arm.

"Nunky—you haven't danced with me."

He found himself looking into Cherry's eyes, and their darkness was strange to him. He had always wondered at the contrast between her dark eyes and her lambent hair.

"Oh, go along and find someone young!"

He sneered at himself, but she was sensitive to that sneer.

"No, I want you to. Don't you know that you are younger than most of these lads?"

He stared at her; he hesitated; he surrendered.

"All right. I haven't all the steps."

"Does that matter? You've got something else—rhythm."

They danced, and Marlow felt like a desperate boy too conscious of the secret that was in him. He was aware of Cherry's face, somehow serene yet sad. She did not look at him directly all through that dance, but he had a strange feeling that a new Cherry was moving with him to the music.

Just before the dance ended she spoke.

"Nunky, I want to come and see you one day. May I?"

"My dear—"

"Yes, alone. It's about—"

But their eyes met, and she said no more. Marlow nodded. Something hurt in him.

"Come over to tea."

"Yes, next Wednesday."

She came in her blue car. It was an

October day, windy and wet and sad, and her mood was like the day. She sat down in the familiar chair to pour out Marlow's tea, but she seemed to him so much older, so much less spontaneous. It was as though she had learnt to hide herself, and even her laughter was a concealment. She cultivated a kind of flippancy.

He sat and wondered. Why had she come, and if she had something on her mind why hadn't she talked to him during the week-end? He lit a pipe, and she watched the familiar process and was strangely moved by it. Philip fiddled with endless cigarettes.

"That's quite like old times, nunky."

"So it is."

He hesitated for a moment. He had a feeling that it was his business to get at the truth.

"What's the trouble, kid? You ought to be able to talk to me."

She lay back in her chair.

"Oh, nunky, I'm bored—horribly, miserably bored!"

He was silent. He got up and stood by the window. He saw the autumn leaves drifting in showers.

"Bored! At your age. That's pretty—"

She gave him the word.

"Serious. It is. You see—but all this sounds so beastly unporting. You've given me so much."

"Don't you and Philip hit it?"

THERE was a silence. She had drawn up her knees and was sitting curled up in the chair with her eyes looking at the fire.

"Not too well. I suppose I oughtn't to—"

"To me. Why not? It matters to me, Cherry."

"Does it?"

"Don't you know that?"

She put up a hand as though to screen her face.

"Ought one to talk? But, then, perhaps you can put me straight. You see, Pip's such a—such a prig."

The word slipped out, but she did not attempt to withdraw it. She seemed to realise that she had to go on.

"You see, nunky, you've done things, and I've never heard you swank. I suppose I took it for granted. But,

The Love Story of Cherry

Pip—oh, it's so boring; it exasperates me, somehow! I used to think that he had the stuff in him, but it's nothing but talk, talk, talk. If he were just a silly ass, I could laugh, but I'm beginning—"

She paused, and Marlow stood very still.

"Well, I'm just sick of his patronising everybody and everything. He's a mass of conceit. Oh, yes, we've had rows!"

"What about?"

"Oh, never mind!"

She did not tell him that she and her husband had fallen out over the name and reputation of Marlow. She did not say that she had flared up over young Fream's manner of referring to her foster-father. He had spoken of Marlow as "Old Slap-stick," and with merciless eloquence she had retorted upon Philip Fream. She had told him that six Freams would not make one Marlow, and that if he would take that superior smirk off his face and do something instead of chattering like a conceited little ape. Yes, they had had a rather devastating row, and Mr. Fream had not had the best of it.

Marlow bit hard at his pipe.

"Marriage is a bit of a problem, kid. Seems to me it has to be worked at like any other big job that is worth while. No man's a complete fool, not even a young man—"

"I wonder?"

She lay curled up in the chair, and suddenly he understood that her illusion was dead. She was seeing young Fream as other people saw him. She had ceased to believe in him; she could not even be sorry for him.

He came and stood behind her and touched her hair.

"Sorry, Cherry. I've always wanted you to be happy."

She caught his hand and held it.

"I know. I'll have another shot, nunky. I didn't know I had a temper till—oh, well, I'll go on trying!"

BUT the affairs of the Fream household did not prosper, or, rather, it may be said that young Fream, offended by Cherry's frankness, set out to prove in no indecisive fashion that he was a man of foresight and forcefulness. Her barbed words had stuck in

his conceit. Oh, yes, he would show her a thing or two, and teach her to be always setting up Marlow as a sort of superman! Damn Marlow!

Young Fream was convinced that he was a financial genius and he set out to create a sensation, but the sensation did not develop as he had intended. He came back to the Cot one winter day looking white about the gills and so obviously ill that Cherry felt sorry for him. But Fream's illness was the result of shock; he was a young man who was very badly frightened.

"Give me a whisky, old thing."

He shivered. He sat in a chair close to the fire and stared at it. The little, chattering monkey in him was mute.

"Had a bad day?"

She sat on a tuffet and observed him. He was drinking the whisky with a kind of futile eagerness. His hand shook. His face looked all edge.

"Business, Philip?"

He nodded. He put down the empty glass and felt for his cigarette-case, and she noticed the ineffectual and fumbling movements of his fingers.

"What has happened?"

The fire and the whisky were warming him, and some of his swagger came back, but it was a flimsy product.

"Oh, the Market has done the dirty on me and caught me short of cash! I'll have to get a loan from somebody."

"You've been speculating, Pip?"

"Oh, just a flutter! If I can hang on, I'll pull it off all right. Only temporary, you know."

He gave her a nervous little glance and a kind of sly smirk, and instantly she divined what was in his mind. She was seeing him as he was, a *papier mâché* man, a self-assertive prig who went to pieces in a tight corner and began to whimper. He could not take punishment. When life called his bluff he began to squeal for help.

"You mean—you will have to borrow money?"

He blew smoke.

"Yep."

"Oh, I see! From 'Old Slap-stick'? Is that the idea?"

He was so full of his own fright that he was not sensitive to her scorn.

"Yep. You're the girl to do it. You can get anything out of the old boy."

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She rose and f

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By Warwick Deeping

If we don't get it, we shall be in a devil of a mess!"

She rose and faced him.

"So that's the idea. You want me to go and ask Richard. You're afraid to go yourself. Well, I shan't go."

"Why not?"

"I've too much self-respect. He has been too good to us as it is. If you want the money go and ask him."

He stared at her. His mouth looked flaccid.

"What's the joke? Oh, I see! Just your damned funny temper. Why shouldn't Nunky Dick fork up? He won't want to see you out in the street, will he?"

She left him by the fire, but at the door she paused.

"I shall tell him not to lend you the money."

SOMETHING hardened in her and for the next few days there was a strained silence between them. She supposed that Philip had abandoned the idea of appealing to Marlow. The crisis was not discussed between them, and young Fream went up to town as usual. And then, one morning, Marlow's car pulled up outside the Cot, and Cherry, getting up from her bureau where she was writing letters, ran down the path to meet him.

She expected to be kissed, and he did not kiss her.

"I've just seen your husband."

And then she understood, but not everything.

"Nunky, he hasn't been to you?"

Marlow nodded.

"Come inside, kid. I'm breaking a promise, but somehow I felt it had to be done. Yes, I'm getting him out of the mess."

She was strangely mute. She went in with him and helped him off with his coat, and her hands seemed to linger near him. She said: "I don't want to call you Nunky any more," and was aware of his sudden confrontation of her and of her own inward tumult.

"Why?"

"Because you're different, somehow, and so am I."

He sat down by the fire. He did not look at her, he dared not look.

"The young fool was playing Bull

and got stranded on a falling market. I have cleared his margin."

She stood holding his coat.

"I shall never forgive him for this."

"Why?"

"He sneaked to you behind my back. I told him not to go to you. You're a man, Dick, and he's—"

And suddenly she was carried away by her impulse. She dropped his coat and, going on her knees by him, clung to him. She hid her face against his shoulder.

"Oh, I can't help it! I don't want to stay here. It's so hopeless. Let me come back, Dick, with you!"

Marlow held her. His face was the face of a man in pain.

"You can't, my dear. Some things—marriage, you know—"

She felt the rigidity of his body, his resistance, and the impulse in her was stayed for a moment.

"I've made the most ghastly mistake. How was it I didn't know? Must I go on living like this? It isn't as if he cared. We hate each other—now."

She felt him trembling.

"My darling, I'm afraid I helped to make this mess. I wanted you to be happy—"

And suddenly she raised her face and looked at him without shame.

"I could be happy with you. Oh, I don't care! I suppose I'm utterly shameless. I didn't realise till—"

He kissed her and, putting her gently aside, stood up.

"Cherry, it's too big a thing. I suppose I've always loved you, but I didn't understand quite how. It can't be done, my dear; it can't be done. You can't come back to me."

She, too, stood up, hands hanging, her dark eyes fixed on him.

"You mean—I've got to go on?"

HE went to the window and stood looking out.

"Oh, somehow! It's not that. I'm not afraid of the world, my dear, but there are things—"

She nodded.

"I can't stay here. It's too utterly dishonest. Why can't one be honest, Dick? I'll go away and live a life of my own. I'll work. Oh, why was I such a silly little fool?"

The Love Story of Cherry

He spoke slowly.

"Yes, you could go away, but then he could make trouble. You wouldn't be free unless——"

She said:

"I know. But I can't stay here. I won't stay here. I'm going to be thorough. You don't know me yet, Dick, just as I didn't know you. I'll just disappear. I'll get a job."

He turned and looked at her with a strange tenderness.

"Oh, well, I'll help you to be thorough! I dare say I can help you to get a job. But what's the idea—at the moment?"

He saw her young face grow resolute.

"Oh, I just disappear! A London hotel till I get something. No address—save to you, and you won't give me away."

"I shan't do that."

"Well, I'll go and pack. You might drive me to the station, Dick. You'll do that for me, won't you?"

He said:

"I will."

SHE left a letter behind her for Philip, and Marlow, having driven her to the station and seen her off, went back to Burfleet feeling that he had made but a poor showing. She had held out her hands to him and he had sent her away. But he was older than she was and with more experience of life, and it rested with him to be wise for her sake. He would give this marriage another chance, for Cherry and the man were so young.

Just before dinner Cherry rang him up, and as he listened to her voice he wondered how long her rebellious mood would last. She gave him the name of her hotel, and then, as though his thoughts had travelled to her on the wire, she answered them:

"I don't think you realise how utterly in earnest I am, dear. I'll never live with the man again. Never! There's only one man——"

And then she rang off.

Marlow hung up the receiver. Those last words of hers had shaken him more than he knew. There was only one man for her now, and her strange young candour roused in him an impulse that

answered hers. She had spoken of the supreme honesty which, when once its eyes are opened, fears neither man nor convention. Was he failing her in this strange and passionate crisis? Was he the conventional coward, the tame man afraid to take the live fire into his hands?

He sat down to dinner. He tried to consider the crisis dispassionately, only to realise that the man in him could not be dispassionate. It was as though Cherry called him to the great adventure, to all that which he had missed—ships, the sea, strange lands, open country. He and Cherry together!

He got up from the table.

"You fool! Madness!"

He went into the room where she had danced, and turned on the wireless, so that the full blare of it filled the room with a tumult of noise, discord. A riot of sound. That was youth, just speed and noise, undisciplined impulse. And then the door opened suddenly, and the bland voice of his elderly parlourmaid addressed him.

"Mr. Fream, sir."

Marlow turned like a fierce swordsman.

"Fream! Show him in."

Fream was shown in under the half-shocked and half-interested eyes of the parlourmaid, for young Fream was drunk, but sufficiently sober to use legs and tongue. The door closed on him. His little, pasty face was like the face of an angry and excited monkey.

"Where's Cherry? What's the game?"

He came lurching up towards Marlow with a kind of chattering truculence.

"You've got her here. She's my wife. I'm not going to be made a fool of!"

Marlow stood and looked at him and his blood began to burn.

"No, she's not here."

"That's a lie! You wouldn't be having that damned machine making music—dance music—all for yourself."

"I have told you she is not here."

"Oh, rot! You've been playing me up, pretending to be so sporting and helping to mess up things behind my back. Look here, Mr. Marlow, I warn you—my blood's up! Where's my wife? You know all right."

Marlow nodded. "Yes, I know, and I'm not going to tell you."

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By Warwick Deeping

AND suddenly young Fream began to shout and wave his arms.

"Oh, aren't you? I'll see to that! Why, you're in love with her yourself, you old swine!"

He was caught open-mouthed by Marlow's fist. He went down and lay squirming, and Marlow stood over him.

"Yes, I suppose I shouldn't have hit you like that, you little, squeaking pup. Get up! Come on!"

He hauled young Fream up by the collar and bundled him out into the hall. The younger man was in an incoordinate knot of flopping arms and legs. He whimpered, but there was a snarl in the sound.

"Lemme go! I'll tell everybody! I'll make you sit up! You and my wife carrying on——"

Marlow thrust him across the hall and, opening the front door, threw him out.

"You go and lie in your kennel."

He closed the door with a crash.

But with the closing of that door another door was opened to him, and in the heart of the crisis he saw life as Cherry had pictured it. Something was both finished and begun, and as he went up the stairs to his bedroom he was aware of the house as an emptiness, a thing that had served its uses and was dead. It was the house of a middle-aged man who had given himself up to the making of money, and Marlow was young.

That blow given full in young Fream's face had been like a blow upon some closed door.

He packed a suitcase, put on a hat, and went out to the garage. He saw no one and spoke to no one. The clock of Burfleet church struck nine, and as he unlocked the doors of the garage he realised that he might never hear that clock strike again. And he was glad. Money? Oh, yes, he had plenty of money!

He ran the car out into the road and, with a last glance at the windows of the house, drove Londonwards.

HE found Cherry sitting alone in a corner of the hotel lounge. The place was empty. She seemed to rise from her chair with one swift movement. She stood looking at him with wide, dark eyes.

"Dick!"

He went and kissed her.

"There is only one thing that matters, Cherry—being honest. If you meant what you said to-day. Yes, I've wiped Burfleet off the map. There's the whole world, you know."

An inquisitive porter peering through a glass door saw a girl and a man clinging together. He paused for a moment, pirouetted, and went off into the vestibule whistling.

"Wish it was me!"

SECOND THOUGHTS

OH! I would like to walk with you,
Go all the narrow ways with you—
Between the hedges, through the lanes
Where shadows fall, when daylight wanes.

But better still, up on the hill
In sunshine; let them gaze their fill!
For 'twere as well the neighbours knew
How glad I am to be with you!

EVE ST. JOHN KING.

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Sept 1930
THE GRAND.

JILLY

2nd B.L.R

By

WARWICK DEEPING

SHE was quite unaware of the fact that certain people referred to her domestic edifice as a blot on the landscape.

It stood on the edge of one of the new arterial roads. It was a bungalow of startling pink and whiteness, with Reckitt's blue curtains, and a front door full of stained glass. It had various sheds and shanties attached to it, and a garden that died away into a weedy wilderness, but displayed patches of brilliancy under the front window.

She was not troubled by the clashing of her colours, by the redness of her petrol pump and the blueness of her curtains, and the splashing of nasturtiums against raw red brick between the pinkness of clarkia and godetia. Red geraniums in butter-tubs painted a bright orange gave her a feeling of smartness.

She thought it beautiful.

To her the precious petrol pump was like the sacred cow. She spoke of it affectionately and familiarly as P.P.

Her pet border in the garden she referred to as The Herbache.

As for the notices and invitations with which the little place was plastered,

He was moved to reflect upon the fact that Jilly would be living here alone.

Anybody could break into that lonely bungalow at night and clear out the little shop and the cash-box. Besides, the mere thief was not the most sinister sort of visitor a girl might have to tackle. And suddenly he remembered Mr. Augustus.

she had painted them herself. "Teas." "Pull In and be at Home." "Fill Up Here." "Ladies."

She was a solid little thing with a boyish face, a snub nose, a very pretty mop of hair, and sturdy legs. Her eyes were pleasant, blue and honest, and looked life straight in the face.

In a sense she was a loud and vulgar little person, a flower of the new age, but not quite so. She might address the world as she addressed the young male—"Hallo, Boy," but she had other stuff in the texture of her, because she had had to take a rather tangled mess into her strong young hands and try and straighten it out.

Because she had a little blackguard boy of a brother who was serving two years, and most deservedly so, in Reading Gaol. And because she had a paralytic mother who sat in a chair and made queer noises and waggled her head at the world.

JACK CAIRNS, the irresponsible Jack Cairns who ran a chicken farm down Marley Lane, came to buy cigarettes at Jilly's. His chicken farm was as irresponsible as his

Jilly

laughter. Life was a joke to Jack, and he himself was part of the joke; a nice lad, so supremely good tempered that he could not quarrel with his own lack of progress. He laughed at his hens, and at the queer people who passed on the road, and at Jilly's idea of a garden; but somehow he could not laugh at Jilly. She told him off.

"Jericho" was painted on her white front gate, and at their second meeting Jack had gone off into joyous laughter. He was a tall, fair lad with freckles, a big mouth and good teeth.

"I say—'Jericho.' Why 'Jericho'?"

"What's the joke?"

"Is there a joke? But — why 'Jericho'?"

She had been terse with him.

"Because we don't fall flat."

"Flat! Oh, how priceless! When the little tin trumpets blow for petrol."

He had a most infectious laugh, but it did not infect Jilly.

"Do a lot of cackling, don't you?"

"Well, why not?"

"Catch it from the hens, I suppose. Pity you can't lay eggs."

"I say, why so peevish! Laughter's jolly good for the world."

"Yes, if it isn't addled."

HE discovered that Jilly did not like being laughed at, and as the friendship grew he discovered that he did not want to laugh at Jilly, for somehow she was to be taken seriously. He heard about the little blackguard of a brother, and he caught glimpses of the poor old paralytic in her chair.

Yes, Jilly was up against it, and "Jericho" ceased to be a jest.

He took to buying cigarettes in the smallest of possible packets so that he could have an excuse for visiting "Jericho."

They had serious discussions upon life and upon motor-cars and upon methods of making money and of failing to make it. Jilly had an abruptness, and a queer deep voice that uttered solemn sayings.

"Well, I like laughing. Life's so dashed funny."

"It isn't at all funny," she retorted.

"Say it isn't a laughing matter."

"It may be to a laughing jackass."

"Easy, you know; I'm a sensitive fellow!"

She was severe with Jack, perhaps because she liked him.

"Why don't you be serious?"

"Serious. Good Lord! you don't know how serious I can be. I'm seriously thinking you——"

"Drop it. I've got a job to do. Why don't you do something?"

"I do."

"Playing about with a lot of old hens."

"Well, what else do you expect me to do?"

"Oh, do something. Be original. Think a bit."

"Think?"

"Yes, get an idea. Ideas have to jump these days. They don't get laid like eggs. My brother's made me think a lot."

"Bit of a lad, isn't he?"

She retorted with scorn.

"Yes, you just twitter. He's a hard-boiled bad one, not like Hard Boiled Herman in 'Rose Marie.' But real bad. You don't seem to know what bad is. Think of a bad egg. Something smelly and useless."

He did not laugh.

"Rather hard luck on you, Jilly."

"Hard luck. Not a bit of it. Just a bad business. He broke us up in town. Wish they'd keep him for life."

"Why not send him to the Colonies?"

"Sounds easy, doesn't it! Nice for the Colonies, too, to have our rotters exported. Try a case of addled eggs on them, my lad. No, Augustus is a reality."

"Is that his name?"

"Yes."

Jack began to laugh, and as suddenly smothered it.

"Sorry. Augustus. Gus. When does he emerge?"

"Three months' time. He doesn't know where we are. I hope the little beast won't get to know."

"I see."

YES, Jilly was an abrupt young person, very masculine and free in her language, and quite up to date, but Jilly was not to be laughed at, and at the back of Jack's mind there was a something that ceased to laugh.

Socially he did not world, for Mr. Cairn school education, an irresponsible and hap he had realised himself five acres of grassland cottage and s hens.

He was quite capable the crudities of "J" "bungallowed grow flimsy, and Jilly th But Jilly was neither and if she had no æst sense of another or new age, new England Nell of Old Drury Petrol Pump.

Jack realised her virtues. He could belong to the tired (We reduce things to epigram. We shive these new people produce anything o like those superior —who call anything successful vulgar an is it? One can be t He laughed at him

"We aren't even adjectives."

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"Jericho" was walls did not fall fl outside the gates a his adjectives. "Jc to feel dissatisfied, and bite the stem of For he did smoke a j occasions.

Jilly had spoken did not appear to "Jericho" might b an artistic abomina It supplied the st asked for, and supp manner.

Yes, Jilly was pat lution, and if her candour and her re school complacency could not make a crowd of hens.

He would stroll and more candour.

"Haven't an idea

Socially he did not belong to Jilly's world, for Mr. Cairns had had a public school education, and after years of irresponsible and happy jesting with life he had realised himself as the owner of five acres of grassland, a rather derelict cottage and so many hundred hens.

He was quite capable of appreciating the crudities of "Jericho." It was a "bungallowed growth," hideous and flimsy, and Jilly thought it beautiful. But Jilly was neither flimsy nor hideous, and if she had no æsthetic sense, she had sense of another order. She was the new age, new England; not quite Sweet Nell of Old Drury, but Jilly of the Petrol Pump.

Jack realised her limitations and her virtues. He could say to himself, "I belong to the tired old cultured crowd. We reduce things to laughter or to an epigram. We shiver at the raw things these new people produce, but we don't produce anything ourselves. We are like those superior people—the critics—who call anything that is new and successful vulgar and cheap tosh. But is it? One can be too nice."

He laughed at himself.

"We aren't even original in our adjectives."

He had two adjectives—"marvellous" and "topping."

"Jericho" was not Biblical. Its walls did not fall flat when he appeared outside the gates and sounded one of his adjectives. "Jericho" caused him to feel dissatisfied, and to sit on a box, and bite the stem of his pipe and think. For he did smoke a pipe on more serious occasions.

Jilly had spoken of ideas, and ideas did not appear to arrive like eggs. "Jericho" might be a crowd concept, an artistic abomination, but it worked. It supplied the stuff that the crowd asked for, and supplied it in the modern manner.

Yes, Jilly was part of the social revolution, and if her abruptness and her candour and her realism sent his public school complacency to the scaffold, he could not make a dying speech to a crowd of hens.

He would stroll round for cigarettes and more candour.

"Haven't an idea, you know."

"That's a pity, isn't it?"

"Quite tragic."

She was busy tidying up after the tea hour, and "Jericho's" tea hour ended somewhere about seven o'clock, and often the world upon the road took eggs to its tea.

"Do you want a job?"

"Anything you like."

"Suppose you couldn't invent an egg that boils itself? But if you want a job you can weed the park. I've got to put mother to bed."

"How many hours a day do you work, Jilly?"

"From dawn to dewy eve, my lad. Good old platitude, a woman's work is never done. You'll find a hoe in the tool-shed."

HE went and possessed himself of the hoe, and set to work upon her "Park," a gravelly space decorated with the oily droppings of the cars that pulled in there. He jabbed at the weeds. He heard Jilly's voice in the bungalow:

"Now, mother, time for bed."

He heard the strange sounds uttered by the old lady. Apparently she was in a fractious mood, and difficult, and Jilly's voice was not the voice of Jilly who sold petrol. It had a gentleness, a patient self-restraint, and Jack ceased jabbing at the weeds.

He thought: "She must be jolly tired, and she has to put that poor old baby to bed, and be good-tempered about it. Her bungalow may be dashed ugly, but after all—"

He went on hoeing weeds, chopping them out of the loose gravel, and leaving them with their feet in the air. He was beginning to understand that there was a fineness in Jilly, this sturdy little person with her blue eyes confronting the world. She provoked him. She put him out of humour with his casual, laughing compromise with life. Jilly did not compromise. She fought.

Then suddenly, Jilly was alone in the world. Mrs. Lambert died in the night, and very early one summer morning Cairns heard a knocking at his door. He was shaving himself. He put a head out of the bedroom window.

"Hallo. Who's that?"

"Jack, I want you."

Jilly

She had been standing in the little green porch, and he saw her tawny head in the slanting sunlight.

"Mother's dead. She must have died in her sleep."

Cairns forgot his lathered chin and rumped hair. He hurried down the cottage stairs.

"I say, Jilly, I'm most awfully sorry. Anything I can do? I'll—"

"I've got to arrange things. I can't leave 'Jericho' without anyone about. Of course I shall shut up for three days."

Her blue eyes stared. Her mouth betrayed a slight tremor.

"I'll come round at once when I have fed the birds. I'll look after things."

"Will you?"

"Of course."

"I must catch the 'bus to Cheal. Poor old mumsie; she didn't have much butter on her bread."

Jack Cairns felt like bringing his soapy face into contact with her grave little countenance.

"Well, you have been a perfectly marvellous little sport to her, anyway. I'll come straight along. Anything particular you want me to do?"

"Just explain to people. I've drawn all the curtains, and shut up the kiosk. And of course—I'm not selling any petrol."

"I see. I'll just tell anybody who pulls in."

"That's it."

"You leave it all to me."

"Thanks most awfully, Jack."

"Oh, not a bit. Wish I could do more."

She went her way, and in half an hour he was at the bungalow, having breakfasted on a slice of bread-and-butter and a glass of milk. He found her sitting on one of the white seats, waiting for the Cheal 'bus. She wore a black hat, and held a little black bag in her lap. Her eyes welcomed him.

"Good Jack! I don't know what I should have done—"

"Don't you worry. I'll stay here till you come back."

CAIRNS remained on duty at "Jericho" through most of the day, and the day chose to be a busy one. People pulled in for petrol

and oil, and Jack had to explain that petrol and oil were not to be had. He was quite polite about it, but quite a number of the drivers who pulled in and were disappointed were not sympathetic. Two young greasers in a filthy old racing car said truculent things to Jack. They asserted that the possession of a petrol pump implied an obligation to supply petrol, and that Jack had better be brisk about it.

He smiled upon them, but less genially than usual.

"Nothing doing. For all I know the tank may be empty."

"I guess we'll try."

"Besides—the thing's locked and I haven't got the key."

"Bluff."

"Besides—I don't like you, so take your stink-machine away—please."

They looked unlovingly upon him as he stood with his hands in his pockets and smiled, but a man who smiled upon you like that was best left alone. He had the air of a man who could hit hard and skilfully if the spirit moved him.

"Oh, go to hell."

"Thanks," said Jack, "after you."

BUT he was moved to reflect upon the fact that Jilly would be living here alone, that—she had been living here all alone, for the mother had been but death in a chair, and however sturdy and self-confident a girl may be, there were people upon the road with whom it might not be good for her to deal. Fellows like those two young blackguards in their racing car. Motor thieves. Oh, plenty of them. And the bullies in lorries.

Jack might be the possessor of a pleasant laugh, but he held rather cynical views on petrol and progress. Anybody could break into that lonely bungalow at night and clear out the little shop and the cash-box. Besides, the mere thief was not the most sinister sort of visitor a girl might have to tackle.

And suddenly he remembered the brother, Mr. Augustus, languishing in Reading Gaol, and due to emerge in four or five weeks' time.

But he did not speak to Jilly on the matter until the old lady had been buried, and "Jericho" had returned to active life. Also, he approached the

subject delicately, to alarm Jilly.

"Suppose you live with you here

No, she was not with her. She knew she could have told cousins, thank you

"I can look after

"Of course you it's just a little longer

"How?"

"Well, at night.

"Think so? Well

little red lantern but

like a lighthouse

red light burning

quite a lot of petrol

dark."

Jack kicked a little road.

"Say—I've got to

"Congratulation

"Be serious. V

on night duty here

we could do a swa

cottage, and I doss

low. My cottage

know."

She looked at him

"Is that your idea

my lad—"

"Oh, nonsense

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Well, there's an al

"What's that?"

"Partnership.

have to get married

She shrugged her

"You—are—fu

what would you be

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"Don't be a cat.

"Oh, very!"

"I've got more

"Well—just k

storage for a while

SO the romance how Jack had was not so appeared. She seemed of worry before eyes. She continued more gently so, finding herself glad was so spontaneous wholesome. It m

By Warwick Deeping

subject delicately, for he did not want to alarm Jilly.

"Suppose you will have someone to live with you here?"

No, she was not having anyone to live with her. She knew of no one whom she could have tolerated. No aunts or cousins, thank you.

"I can look after myself."

"Of course you can, to a point. But it's just a little lonely, kid."

"How?"

"Well, at night."

"Think so? Why, when I've lit the little red lantern beside P.P. I feel I'm like a lighthouse keeper. I keep that red light burning till eleven. You sell quite a lot of petrol sometimes—after dark."

Jack kicked a loose pebble into the road.

"Say—I've got an idea."

"Congratulations."

"Be serious. Why shouldn't I take on night duty here? What I mean is—we could do a swap. You sleep in my cottage, and I doss down in the bungalow. My cottage is off the road, you know."

She looked at him severely.

"Is that your idea? I'm no prude, my lad—"

"Oh, nonsense. Where are the neighbours? Besides—these—days—Well, there's an alternative."

"What's that?"

"Partnership. Jack and Jill will have to get married."

She shrugged her shoulders at him.

"You—are—full of ideas. And what would you be, the sleeping partner or the laughing partner? Why—"

"Don't be a cat. I'm serious."

"Oh, very!"

"I've got more ideas."

"Well—just keep them in cold storage for a while."

SO the romance lingered, but somehow Jack had the feeling that Jilly was not so confident as she appeared. She seemed to carry a little knot of worry between her two frank eyes. She continued to be abrupt, but more gently so, for secretly she was finding herself glad of his laughter. It was so spontaneous and reassuring and wholesome. It made her realise that

there was something lovable and comforting in Jack.

Besides, she was worried. She had to allow to herself that she was worried about her brother.

He would be at large very shortly, and Augustus at large was a menace. He was much more irresponsible than Jack, and quite differently so. He was just a nasty, dissolute, violent little animal. He was open to no appeal. You got rid of him by giving him money, but you knew that the riddance would be temporary.

If Augustus discovered where she was!

Yes, she would have trouble.

She found herself getting jumpy. She began to count the days that remained until the cage would be opened. She felt uneasy and suspicious, and at night she would go round with a torch. She began to feel a little shy of late customers. And one night—quite late—she thought she heard someone prowling, and going out and flashing her torch, she saw a pair of legs and old white tennis shoes.

"Who's that?"

"It's all right, Jilly."

"You! What are you messing about here for?"

He laughed gently.

"I just take an evening stroll up here. Special constable stunt, my dear. It's an idea."

She turned the light on his face.

"Mean to say you hang around here every night?"

"That so. Any reason against it? The road is public, and the tennis shoes are nice and quiet, and paid for."

She was silent for a moment. She was moved.

"Jack, you are a bit of a sport."

"A special sport! Services accepted?"

"I'm rather glad you're somewhere about."

"Well, that's that."

THE door of the cage opened during the first week in September, and Jilly knew that her beautiful brother bird was fluttering on the wings of freedom. How nice it was to have such a brother! She knew that she would be profoundly ungrateful to

Jilly

anyone who should give Augustus information as to her whereabouts. Aunt Effie—who lived in Camden Town—knew it, and if Gus called on Aunt Effie that rather soapy opportunist might get rid of Augustus by giving him sixpence and his sister's address. Aunt Effie always had managed to buy male applause at sale prices.

Jilly thought: "If he comes down here I'll tell him something. He won't sponge on me. But I rather wish I had a telephone. Makes one feel less isolated."

She stiffened her courage and reproved herself.

"Don't be silly. Gus always was a horrid little funk. Two years may have taught him something."

But in her heart of hearts she suspected that nothing would teach Augustus to be at all decent. He was all Augustus and all bad.

Somewhere about the second week in September Jack set out on his nightly patrol. There was no moon, and the road had a black, windy emptiness. All traffic seemed to have ceased, though as he had stood to light his pipe in the porch he had heard a lorry go banging and clattering up the main road. He fancied that it had stopped for a moment outside Jilly's bungalow, and then had rumbled on.

He found himself walking a little faster than usual.

Jilly's red lantern was alight, and so were the lower windows of the bungalow, and no cars were parked outside the white fence. Jack paused to sit down on one of the wooden benches. The little place seemed as usual, and then—suddenly—he was aware of voices coming from the bungalow. One of the voices was Jilly's, the other a man's, and both voices were angry.

Cairns did not stand on ceremony. He made for the nearest window, and it happened to be the window of Jilly's parlour. It was closed and the curtain had been drawn across it, but the blue curtain did not quite cover the glass. Jack saw Jilly standing with her back to the little fumed oak bureau in which she kept her cash-box, and confronting a young man whom Jack took to be her brother. There was a likeness, save that all that was pleasant and sturdy in

the girl was somehow travestied in the man. He was a solid, sullen, nasty-looking fellow dressed in a plus-four suit, the breeches of which seemed to hang half way down his thick calves. He had a huge mouth in which a front tooth was missing. His eyes suggested the eyes of some sullen, threatening animal.

Jilly's brother had his back to the door. He had his sister cornered. He stood with his large head thrust forward, and his smile was unpleasant.

"No use bluffing. You've got to pay."

She defied him.

"Not a penny. I'm not afraid of you, my lad. It doesn't do to be afraid of a thing like you."

Jack Cairns slipped round to the front door. It was locked, and as he tried the handle he heard sounds inside the bungalow, the crash of something overturned. Urgently and unceremoniously he charged the flimsy door and the lock-plate gave. He opened the second door. He had a glimpse of two confused and struggling figures, of Jilly being forced backwards over the table. The man had her by the hair and throat.

SUDDENLY, the two struggling figures came apart. They stood close together, breathing hard, and looking at Jack Cairns. A little trickle of blood ran from a corner of the girl's mouth. Her blue eyes showed the blackness of widely dilated pupils.

"Jack——"

She drew swiftly aside.

"Jack, may I introduce you to my charming brother. He has fallen in love with my cash-box."

And Jack smiled, but his smile was unusual. It seemed to fix itself upon that thick set, stubby figure.

"Charming fellow—I gather. Delighted to meet you on this auspicious occasion. I think you had better come outside."

He saw the glare in those muddy blue eyes. He was prepared. The other rushed at him like a little bull, and met that ready fist. He went back as far as the sofa, staggered there, got his balance and charged again, this time more cunningly. He tried a jab at Jack's body, one ugly and foul blow, but it missed, and he took an upper-cut from

Cairns. Jack gave a glance.

"Better get out of here. I'll try and get some furniture."

She went, slipping back, almost unwillingly.

"Don't take any more dirt."

"Quite. I appreciate it."

JACK did not take as a matter of fact, as a powerful little nice distinctions as to tried to use a chair rough and tumble "Jericho" suffered hearing sounds of a flat, could not remain flat, could not remain flat, could not remain flat.

But it was Augustus and truly floored, whether he was in next. Jack held the "Sorry, Jilly. Me I'm afraid, but I think the business."

A dazed and bleary up, and Jack admonished chair-leg.

"Truncheons out, up. I suppose you want 'Yes.'"

"March, my lad."

Augustus rose very was out of him and the fellow with the smile he meant it.

Jack kept the chair

St. B. S. R.

By Warwick Deeping

Cairns. Jack gave Jilly one rapid glance.

"Better get outside. We'll settle it in here. I'll try and take care of the furniture."

She went, slipping out behind Jack's back, almost unwillingly.

"Don't take any chances. He's dirty."

"Quite. I appreciate the situation."

JACK did not take any chances, for as a matter of fact Augustus did not leave him such margin. He was a powerful little brute, and with no nice distinctions as to sportmanship. He tried to use a chair on Jack, and in the rough and tumble the interior of "Jericho" suffered damage, and Jilly, hearing sounds of solid objects falling flat, could not remain off the stage.

But it was Augustus who lay flat, well and truly floored, and not knowing whether he was in this world or the next. Jack held the leg of a chair.

"Sorry, Jilly. Made rather a mess, I'm afraid, but I think we have finished the business."

A dazed and bleeding Augustus sat up, and Jack admonished him with the chair-leg.

"Truncheons out, you observe. Get up. I suppose you wish him removed?"

"Yes."

"March, my lad."

Augustus rose very slowly. The rage was out of him and he was cowed. This fellow with the smile could hit as though he meant it.

Jack kept the chair-leg in evidence.

"Now, look here, we'll give you this chance. I suppose your sister will agree? Right. Now, clear out, and don't come here again. Bad business for you. You see—this show is a partnership, and I interview all door-crashers."

Augustus was busy with a rather dirty handkerchief. He snuffled.

"Nice sister I've got. Won't give a chap—"

"Oh, get out."

THEY watched him disappear down the dark road. They were standing by Jilly's red lantern and Jack's arm went round the old-fashioned waist of the new-fashioned woman.

"Well, that's that! Rather a sentimental attitude—this—old thing? We've lapsed."

She leaned against him.

"It is rather useful to have a man about sometimes."

"So it seems. What price the neo-realists?"

He laughed, and his laughter was mischievous.

"I say, sex prejudice is a pretty serious problem, isn't it? And marriage and all that—is supposed to be obsolete. Let's be obsolete. I've got an idea—"

"Another idea?"

"Same old thing. Seems to crop up somehow."

He laughed and she laughed with him.

"Yes, doesn't it!"

SUMMER

SNOW-WHITE ships in a wide blue sea,
Ships with billowing sails held high;
Winds are blowing light-heartedly
Snow-white ships in a wide blue sea—
That is how they appear to me:
Tossing clouds in the summer sky,
Snow-white ships in a wide blue sea,
Ships with billowing sails held high.

LESLIE M. OYLER.

Cassell's Feb 1926

3.5

An Old Woman

WARWICK DEEPING

SHE wore a shabby brown macintosh, an old-fashioned straw hat, and a white woollen muffler wrapped round her throat. Letting herself down laboriously from the high carriage, she looked up at the elderly American who had lifted her handbag from the rack and was passing it to her.

"Thank you so much."

Her very bright old eyes—in colour a greyish blue—smiled up at him out of her waxy, wrinkled face. Shabby she was, and frail and grey, but there was something indomitable and cheery about her. She looked ill; she had a cough; you could hear her uneasy breathing.

"I hope you will have a good time at Bordighera."

The American smiled back and raised his hat. He watched her as she moved away along the platform looking for a porter, and he wondered. What was she doing at Monte Carlo, anyway? Was she one of those inveterate old gamblers, shabby and pathetic figures venturing their precious ten-franc notes? Or was she just an eccentric, one of those anonymous and homeless old women, *sur le branche*, or in search of the sun? Her incongruity interested him. True, Monte Carlo had its shabby people, but her shabbiness struck him as being more finely threadbare, more proud and valiant than the shabbiness of a sophisticated and parasitic poverty. She had chatted to him quite merrily. She was not a whimperer.

She was producing a luggage receipt and trying to attract the attention of a porter who was not interested in impecunious old women. He growled something at her. She picked up her black handbag and disappeared through the wicket, and that was the last the American saw of her. As the train steamed out of the station the surly porter came down the platform pushing

a truck full of luggage, and on the top of the pile was balanced a cheap, green, fibre trunk, with the fabric of it torn at one corner. Its owner's name was painted in black letters upon the lid:

"C. VENNER."

The American had read that name on the label of the old lady's handbag.

Outside the station a row of hotel buses waited. Sardonic, ironical, gold-braided hotel porters stood about and exchanged witticisms, and were ready at any moment to be insolent or servile. Mrs. Venner was looking for the omnibus of the Hôtel Magenta. She could not see it, and a fat fellow in a sea-blue uniform, winking at a friend, made himself mockingly polite.

"Which is madame's hotel?"

He had a blue jowl, waxed and up-turned moustachios, and the air of a very devil of a fellow. Mrs. Venner looked him straight in the face.

"Thank you. The Hôtel Magenta. Is the bus here?"

For some reason or other the man seemed abashed. He began to bawl, "Magenta—Hôtel Magenta!" until the porter of the Hôtel Magenta bustled up, hat in hand.

"Madame Venner?"

"Yes. Will you please see to my trunk."

The other fellow, having been chastened by the old lady's direct stare, turned to ask a friend "what that bundle of old clothes could be doing at the Magenta?"

The Magenta was a second-class hotel. It stood in a back street behind three rather rusty palm trees, a stretch of shingle, and a patch of autumn-sown grass that looked as though it had been laid down like a carpet. Mrs. Venner was helped out of the hotel omnibus by the concierge.

"Madame has a room reserved?"

"Certainly!"

She went in. She knew the hotel world

as only an impecunious old woman knows it. This hybrid world of the Riviera was different. The bureau clerk, young, pallid, insolently dispassionate, observed her with a pair of flat and slate-coloured eyes. Mrs. Venner knew at once what was behind those eyes. Properly handled the fellow would cringe.

"You have a room reserved for me. Mrs. Venner."

Languidly he prepared to look through a letter file, but she produced a letter from her bag.

"Here is your acknowledgment reserving me a room."

She became aware of the bureau clerk gazing in a particular sort of way at someone who had arrived and was standing beside her. She felt herself observed.

"The manager, madame," said the clerk.

She turned. A neat, black and white gentleman, with a smudge of hair on his upper lip, gave her a very slight bow. He continued his observation. It was coldly impartial, the stare of your cynically greedy *hôte* with a face of white wax and eyes that see nothing but money.

"Madame wishes to stay here?"

"You have reserved me a room."

The two men exchanged understanding glances.

"Number ninety-seven," said the bureau clerk, who knew how to fit a room to an occasion or a person.

"Will you have my luggage sent up?"

"Certainly, madame!"

She knew that they were watching her as she walked to the lift, and that had she shown timidity or hesitation there would have been no room for her in the Hôtel Magenta. Regrets, apologies, protestations! A mistake had been made! The hotel was full!

Room ninety-seven was on the third floor, a little oblong tank compressed between the well of the lift and the chambermaids' closet, its window facing north and opening upon the back of some high building. The room had no radiator; it was very poorly furnished; it was all that Mrs. Charlotte Venner had expected it to be. She knew this type of room, this odd corner into which people who appeared of no account were pushed.

She unfastened her macintosh, and sat down on the bed. The mirror in the door of the little wardrobe showed her the

dummy figure of an old woman with a bloodless face and anxious eyes. She made herself smile.

"This is the room for clients who are to be discouraged."

She took off her hat. She was thinking of the hotel manager and the bureau clerk, sleek and sallow and cynical. Poor devils, they had money to make for somebody! They had positions to think of, but what a pity that she should have to regard them as enemies.

"So long as I am not ill," she reflected; "so long as I am not ill."

She shivered slightly. That was the fear that dodged and grimaced behind her courage. She could keep the flag flying so long as her body did not fail her.

"Yes, I can fight them," she thought; "keep off the wolves so long as I can totter. An ugly old woman like me! Forty years ago—men smirked and were in a hurry to appear charming. To keep on one's feet, that's it. Let them get you down, and out you go. But does it matter?"

An aproned and be-slipped valet appeared with her trunk. He was an oldish man, with a gentle and melancholy face, and under his high, bald forehead his glances drooped perpetually. He went about looking at shoes and carpets; his life was the life of the floor.

"Will madame have the trunk here?"

"Please!"

The *femme de chambre* followed him. Mrs. Venner looked at the woman and smiled. She was an Italian. Good! Italian women are kind.

Mrs. Venner spoke to her in Italian. It was not what she said, but her manner of saying it, that lit up the dark eyes in the pale, tired face. Some instant sympathy was aroused between them, the understanding of good women who work and are poor.

"Madame would like some hot water—yes?"

"Thank you, Maria. Is it Maria?"

"*Si, signora.*"

Her dark eyes looked inquiringly at the old lady, and then threw a quick glance round the tank of a room.

"You stay here?"

"They have put me here. I have not much money. They look at clothes, my dear."

The Italian approached the bed, and ran a hand under the sheets.

"I will find another blanket. Does the signora like a hot bottle?"

Her voice was caressing and kind.

"Thank you, Maria. I am very tired, but I do not give much trouble."

"It is no trouble, signora. I—too—know what it is to be tired."

Later, in the dining-room of the Hôtel Magenta, Mrs. Venner was given a table in a draughty corner between the door and the entrance to the service. Waiters hurried to and fro, brushing close against her table. The *maitre d'hôtel*, standing over her with the wine list, gazed disparagingly at the top of her grey head.

"No wine, thank you!"

"What will madame drink?"

"Water!"

She was abrupt with him, and with an almost perceptible shrug he set a carafe on the table.

"Madame's water."

She glanced round the room. Decorated in white and gold and plastered with mirrors, it made itself look more spacious than it was, and repeated in its mirrors the little white tables and the figures of the diners. Mrs. Venner had some experience of hotel dining-rooms and the people who filled them. The Hôtel Magenta was smart with the smartness of five and eleven pence three farthings. It pretended. It gave you mirrors and gilding, and a very thin menu. It catered for people who insisted on making a show, people who talked about "Monte," people who were lavish for a month, people whose hands must come down on the keyboard of life with a crash. Mrs. Charlotte looked at her own hands as she waited to be given soup.

She was a pianist. In her more prosperous days she had been a brilliant amateur, but now—as she put it with one of her whimsical brave glint of the eyes—"I'm an old professional hack, my dears, touting for bread and butter." That was how she lived and kept the flag flying.

A plate of watery soup was placed in front of her. She raised a spoon with that delicate and sensitive white hand.

"This place is not going to be much good to me."

A gaunt woman of five-and-forty, with a flaming mouth and a shingled head, sat down at a neighbouring table with a bald man whose cheeks were blotched and pendulous. The woman began to talk in a loud voice. She looked across at Mrs.

Venner, who was wearing her one black evening dress hooked high up about the throat. The green eyes stared in the chalked face.

Smart people!

A satin toe touched a glacé shoe. The heavy man swung a head like a bull's and glared.

"That old black bundle in the corner!"

Mrs. Venner smiled faintly over her soup. She knew the sort of thing such people said. It was a stupid and a brutal world, but not half so stupid and brutal and callous as the dining-room of the Hôtel Magenta might suggest. People did fine and unselfish things. It was only the doing of some occasional fine and unselfish thing that made life worth while—that and music. Such was Mrs. Venner's philosophy.

She finished her dinner early and went out into the lounge. A piano stood in a far corner under a palm in a huge brown pot on a majolica pedestal. She sat down and, touching the notes tentatively, began to play some plaintive Polish thing. Loud voices and laughter began to collect behind her. The gaunt woman of the flaming mouth lit a cigarette stuck in a long amber holder, and glanced impatiently at the "black bundle."

"Suppose we shall have a plate sent round?"

"No, my dear," said the old lady to herself, "not here—I think." And she rose from the piano and went up to her tank of a room.

Next day she set out on what she called one of her "snubbing expeditions"—that is to say, she visited a number of hotels, saw the proprietor or manager, and asked to be allowed to play the piano in the hotel salon after dinner. "A little piano recital, monsieur. Afterwards I collect a little money." Some *hôteliers* snubbed her; others explained that they did not like their patrons to be worried; others would allow her to play, but would not agree to her going round with a plate. People must not be asked for money. She could leave a plate and a little advertisement card on a table by the door so that the mean and the thrifty could sneak out without contributing. Some managers insisted on half the receipts being given to charity.

Smiling, she would agree.

"Of course, monsieur!"

Now and again she discovered a human

person, or one with more insight and sympathy, who would see in her the gallant old soul, game to the last fence.

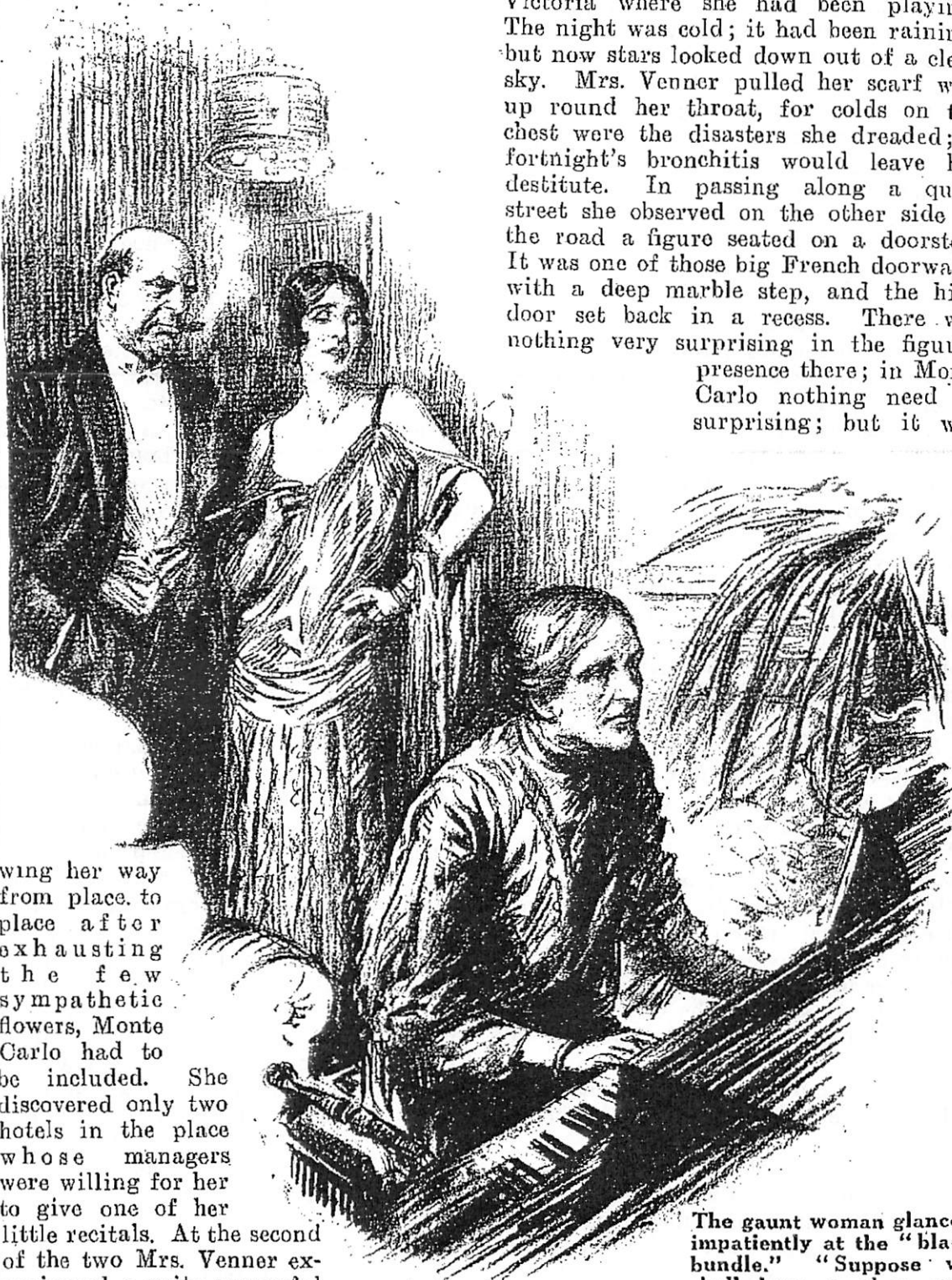
But Monte Carlo was not a pleasure resort that was much in sympathy with Mrs. Venner. Cannes, Nice, and especially Mentone, were better, but since this old honey-bee culling her few francs had to

evening. She had been inspired by a sympathetic presence. She had played as she could play when sympathy was given her. She came away with nearly two hundred francs.

That night she had an adventure. She had had many adventures in her time.

It was late when she left the Hôtel Victoria where she had been playing. The night was cold; it had been raining, but now stars looked down out of a clear sky. Mrs. Venner pulled her scarf well up round her throat, for colds on the chest were the disasters she dreaded; a fortnight's bronchitis would leave her destitute. In passing along a quiet street she observed on the other side of the road a figure seated on a doorstep. It was one of those big French doorways, with a deep marble step, and the high door set back in a recess. There was nothing very surprising in the figure's presence there; in Monte Carlo nothing need be surprising; but it was

wing her way from place to place after exhausting the few sympathetic flowers, Monte Carlo had to be included. She discovered only two hotels in the place whose managers were willing for her to give one of her little recitals. At the second of the two Mrs. Venner experienced a quite successful



The gaunt woman glanced impatiently at the "black bundle." "Suppose we shall have a plate sent round?"

the pose of the figure that attracted Mrs. Venner's attention. A girl, huddled in a corner, her head thrown back, the white line of her throat showing, her hands lying in her lap!

Mrs. Venner crossed the road. A street lamp was burning close by. She saw that the girl was asleep, and Mrs. Venner knew that kind of sleep; it came at the end of despair and exhaustion.

She bent down and touched the girl's knee. The response was vivid, an awaking shudder, an inarticulate sort of cry, and then two eyes staring in a white face.

"What is it, my dear?"

The girl seemed to crouch. She answered in English:

"I'm tired—that's all. I fell asleep."

Her note of defiance was brittle and pathetic.

"On a doorstep! Well—I know that tiredness. I have slept on a doorstep—once—myself."

She sat down, she looked at the girl and saw her droop, her moment of defiance had been no more than a poorly starched piece of linen. Her two hands huddled themselves together in her lap.

"I have nowhere to go to-night."

The old lady touched her shoulder.

"Tell me."

"Why should I? A stranger——"

"And you have had nothing to eat?"

"Not since breakfast. But I have fifteen francs, but it is all I——"

"I know. Rather precious. I have been down to five francs myself. I always keep a ring or two in reserve. I make my living playing the piano. Well, won't you tell me how it happened?"

The girl looked sullen. She was a pretty dark thing, one of those women who are fooled so easily, perhaps because they love so easily.

"Why should I?"

"Because I'm an old woman——"

The girl looked at her.

"You're religious, I suppose?"

"Not a bit, my dear, in the ordinary sense."

"What if I do tell you?"

"Telling helps, doesn't it. There were days when I used to talk to a shabby old tabby cat."

Suddenly the girl's will to resist collapsed. She sat huddled and shivering against Mrs. Venner, gulping tears and telling her story. It was a very usual

story. A man had made a fool of her; he was a sort of suburban person with plenty of money and a tempestuous wife. The girl had been his typist; he had planned this secret adventure, but somehow the tempestuous wife had got wind of it, and had followed them up. She was not a woman to surrender her rights; not she. The amorous fool had turned craven. Someone had to be propitiated, and a woman with a furious temper carried such occasions. Also she had carried off her Don Juan. She had even impounded his pocket book. The girl's trunk had been sent to the station. She had been left sans hotel, ticket, ready money.

"I can stand cads," said Mrs. Venner; "but not cowardly cads. We shall have to see to this."

"I want to get home," wailed the girl.

"Of course, my dear; the thing is to get you home."

She was a woman of resources, and of occasional audacities. She recovered the limp figure from the doorstep and took it along with her to the Hôtel Magenta. There were a few people still sitting in the lounge when Mrs. Charlotte entered with her derelict, but the bureau clerk had left for the night, and the night porter was not in evidence. Mrs. Venner marched her young woman straight for the stairs and up the three flights to the third storey. She was out of breath. She opened the door of ninety-seven, and pushing the girl in, reclosed the door.

The good Maria was still on duty. Mrs. Venner found her in the closet where she sat sewing.

"Maria, I have found a poor child who has been badly treated by a man. I am taking her into my room for to-night. Need anything be said about it?"

The Italian woman smiled.

"No, signora; I shall say nothing."

"I have got to send the child home. She has no money, and I haven't very much. If she sleeps in my bed I cannot see that we have robbed the hotel of anything."

"They charge you too much, signora. Moreover, the girl can go down to-morrow by the back stairs."

"Splendid! You are a kind woman, Maria."

"I work," said she. "If we meet anyone on the back stairs, I can say she is a friend of mine. Besides, none of us will want to tell tales to the management."

Mrs. Venner's old eyes gleamed

"We have to help each other—we poor people. I suppose, Maria, some boiling water is not possible?"

"Why not, signora."

"The child has had nothing to eat. I can give her some tea and bread and butter."

So the girl slept in Mrs. Venner's bed, and the old lady, protesting that she would lie down beside her when the exhausted one had fallen asleep, spent the night nodding in an armchair. She wore her macintosh, but the little unheated tank of a room was cold, and when the morning came the pianist felt chilled and stiff. Her cough, never quite absent, woke the occupant of the bed.

"I am afraid you must get up, my dear. We have to get you out of the hotel *sub rosa*. Go out and get some breakfast, and wait for me in the gardens by the casino. We will see what can be done."

The girl dressed herself while Mrs. Venner went in search of Maria.

"Can it be done now?"

"*Sì, signora.*"

When Mrs. Venner went back to number ninety-seven the girl flung herself at her and held her fast.

"Oh, how good you have been."

"Pass it on, my dear, some day. Go and get some breakfast, and expect me in the gardens at ten. Now, Maria is going to smuggle you down the service stairs."

It was done, and the old pianist lay down for an hour on the bed that the young body had warmed. She was very tired, she was conscious of a slight feeling of malaise; but she rallied herself.

"You—can't—be ill. You have to send this child home, and to-night you must earn some more money. And a ring has to be disposed of. *Allons!*"

Maria herself brought the old lady's coffee and rolls.

"It happened quite nicely, signora. No one but Alphonse saw us, and Alphonse is reliable. But the signora looks very tired."

"You dear good creature—I can't afford to be tired. Some hot coffee. And then I am going out to send that child home."

She did it. She sold a ring, one of her precious rings kept as an insurance against disaster, and adding the proceeds to the two hundred odd francs she had earned the previous night, she was able to pack the girl off to England with twenty francs in her pocket.

"I'll pay you back. And I'll never forget."

"Oh, pay it to someone else, my dear, some day."

"No, no, I have your name and address."

"My dear, my address is anywhere in Europe where a few people will drop small change into a plate. Good-bye."

The girl hung out of the window and kissed the brave old face, and when the train had gone Mrs. Venner crawled very slowly out of the station and up the steep steps to the Casino terrace. She wanted to sit in the sun for awhile. She knew now that she was going to be ill.

That evening, though her feeling of malaise had increased, she tramped out to one of the hotels whose manager had shown himself sympathetic. It was not a very successful evening. She had an audience of a dozen people; she had attacks of coughing that interfered with her playing, and her hands felt like lead. When it came to a circular tour with her plate round the big and empty salon, her spirit failed her. She had not the physical courage, somehow, to carry that plate round, and try to smile at those casual and impersonal faces.

But someone—a little pale woman with dark hair—came and did it for her.

"Do let me take it round. I have so enjoyed your playing."

"Thank you. I have to do it."

"I will."

The little woman collected seventeen francs, and that was all that Mrs. Venner took back to the Hôtel Magenta. She went up in the lift to number ninety-seven, while an inward voice kept repeating the words: "You are going to be ill."

Next morning she did not get up, and the kind Maria found her in bed, coughing and breathing heavily.

"I am afraid I have caught a cold. I shall stay in bed to-day."

"Would the signora like a doctor?"

"My dear, I cannot afford doctors."

When the hotel management discovered that meals were being sent up to number ninety-seven, Maria was sent for and questioned. What was the matter with the occupant of number ninety-seven? Maria, with all her sympathies on the side of the old lady, declared that Madame Venner had nothing more serious than a slight cold on the chest.

Two more days passed, and Mrs. Venner was still confined to her room. The dread

thing had overtaken her; the old flag at the masthead fluttered feebly.

On the morning of the third day Maria, white with restrained anger, came to announce the manager. He entered the room followed by a stout and phlegmatic woman dressed in black. Mrs. Venner happened to be in the thick of a spasm of coughing. The manager had only to look at her grey face to realize that the old woman was ill.

They wanted to turn her out. She had expected it, and there was something in her that refused to resist. She was incapable of physical resistance, but her pride could still flare.

"I am sorry, but if madame is ill—she must go to a hospital. We cannot afford illness in our hotel."

She managed to wring out a smile.

"Not even if I pay?"

"It would be very expensive; and we do not wish it. I can recommend madame to a good nursing home."

They were determined to be rid of her, and she knew it, and her courage rose to meet this last occasion.

"Very well. Will you let me have my bill. I ask for no favours."

Actually he had brought the bill with him. He presented it with a little, cold, deprecating bow. She glanced at the amount. Yes, she had just enough money to pay it. All that would remain to her would be a few francs, a ruby and diamond ring, and her poor clothes—and her battered luggage.

"Very good, monsieur; I will have the money sent down to you. You will give me the address of the nursing home. The *femme de chambre* will pack for me."

He bowed and went out with the woman in black who had come to support the formalities, and when they had gone Maria reappeared.

"I am going to a little hospital, my dear. Will you pack for me, and help me to dress?"

Maria looked shocked.

"But is the signora fit to leave her bed?"

"Oh, yes."

"They are turning you out. They have no heart, the greedy wretches!"

"Sick old women are a nuisance, my dear."

When Maria had packed her poor things, Mrs. Venner struggled up and dressed. It was to be her last brave effort,

a gesture of pride; and even in the midst of her coughings and her pantings she managed to smile.

"I shall be all right, my dear. Will you get the concierge to order me a cab."

The Italian woman was on the edge of tears.

"It is infamous," she said; "I shall leave this place to-morrow."

The luggage was taken downstairs, a cab ordered, and Mrs. Venner was helped into the lift and out through the hotel doors by Maria and the bald-headed and gentle valet. They put her into the cab; the old lady kissed Maria.

"Good-bye, my dear, you have been very good to me. God bless you."

But she did not drive to the little private hospital. The cabman heard himself being hailed in a firm voice when he had driven a hundred yards or so. He turned in his seat.

"Drive me to the station."

"The station, madame!"

"Yes."

A train had just emptied itself, and the crowd was streaming up to the steps to the great cream-coloured Casino. It overhung the place like a huge white cliff, arrogant and final, and old Mrs. Venner, glancing upwards, felt herself sinking into the shadows at the foot of that cliff. But what did it matter? She had sent that girl home; she had answered those people of the Hôtel Magenta with a gesture of pride. She had kept the flag flying.

She retained the cab while the porter was putting her luggage into the cloak-room and getting her her receipt. She gave the battered old trunk a friendly and farewell pat, as though it were a live thing. She managed to get back into the cab without being helped.

"Drive me to the Casino."

"Yes, madam."

"You can put me down at the bottom of the gardens."

The cabman looked at her curiously when she got out and paid him, and gave him a generous *pourboire*.

"Bon soir, madame."

As he was driving away he saw her sit down on one of the seats.

How many of the defeated and the disillusioned have sat upon those seats, with that exotic sweep of grass and flowers behind them, and the great Casino blocking out the blue of the sea, and the

crowded tables of the Café de Paris for ever changing their little human figures. But Mrs. Charlotte was neither disillusioned nor defeated. Her philosophy still held, though the dark water was rising to her old lips. She had made music; she had rounded off life with a *beau geste*. She was very tired.

She went to sleep on the seat, but now and again her cough woke her. She would open her eyes and see the same crowd and the same huge building, the same kiosks, the same trees. No one interfered with her; it is probable that no one noticed her, a shabby old woman on a seat, with her hat slightly awry.

Her eyes drooped and opened, and drooped and opened. Dusk followed daylight. There came to her glimpse of lights, hundreds and hundreds of lights, a yellow blur, the sheeted rays of the motor lamps, dim figures, vague movement, the faint music of the orchestra playing in the Café de Paris. Life was growing dim, a shadow show, with the stars overhead washed out by the stars of cosmopolis. The Tête de Chien brooded.

People came and sat on the seat and left it. To the old pianist they had ceased to be real people. They were ghosts. She had music in her head, music of strange gentleness and exultation. She had ceased to cough, for her body—sinking into the deep sweet waters—had ceased to protest.

She sat on. The stage began to empty itself, and the lights to die out. No one bothered about the old bundle on the seat, not even some punctilious gendarme. As the lights dwindled the stars resumed their sway.

But there was to be one last gesture. She was not to end her music huddled on a seat. In the deepening emptiness and silence she struggled up and managed to step over the low railing separating the path from the gardens. She fell prone on the grass, but had sufficient will to crawl into a patch of shadow. Her hand touched something—flowers. She lay down beside a bed of violas and daisies and red wall-flowers. One of her hands rested among the flowers.

They found her there next morning. She seemed to be sleeping.



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The Grave in the Garden

by WARWICK DEEPING

IT was raining when we reached the bridge over the Nesse and saw Hoche-fort grey among its pines upon the side of its steep hill, but over the Belgian town the grey clouds trailed ragged edges of light, and a pale finger of sunlight touched the tower of the château.

The regiment had halted, and an orderly came trotting back from the head of the column.

"Captain Malcolm, sir, the C.O. wants you."

Colonel Slattery and the adjutant were sitting their horses just beyond the bridge, and when I rode up and saluted, Slattery's blue eyes smiled at me out of his wrinkled and humorous face, and yet I knew by his smile that he understood how I was feeling.

"I am sending a troop on ahead, Malcolm. Care to take it?"

I was cold with suspense, for ever since August, 1914, more than four years ago, my little Belgian wife had been shut up in Hoche-fort. I had had no news of her for two months; her last letter had reached me about a month before the Armistice.

"I would, sir."

He looked at me kindly.

"Very well. Take one of your subalterns with you. And if you care to leave him in charge—"

I saluted and thanked him.

"It is good of you, sir."

"Good luck, Malcolm!" And he turned away with the air of a man who hated to be thanked.

I took young Roberts with the troop, and we went away at a fast trot between the rows of wintry poplars. My thoughts galloped ahead of us into that steep old town and away over the pine-clad ridge where Helene and I had built a house in 1914. The house had never been finished,

and I—the Brussels director of an Anglo-Belgian firm—had been caught abroad in the U.S.A. when the war had opened.

I suppose that was the most extraordinary ride of my life. It was like plunging into a world that had been four-years dead, and I noticed that young Roberts who rode beside me never uttered a word, and never looked in my face. We were within two-hundred yards of the outlying houses when that dead town in its winter landscape suddenly came to life. We saw people running along the road towards us. They were waving handkerchiefs, little Belgian flags; I knew that they were shouting—cheering us—for, except for prisoners, we were the first English soldiers these Belgians had ever seen.

In a minute we were in the midst of them—a poor, shabby, exultant crowd. Every door and side street seemed to pour out people. They ran along beside us, frantic, shouting, slipping in among the horses. I found an old woman kissing my field-boot.

And somehow it hurt, for I was afraid. I glanced at the girls in the crowd. I wondered whether the woman I was looking for—

We came to the Place by the old Hôtel de Namur. The *pavé* was grey; the plane-trees had dropped their leaves. I was aware of a pathetic shabbiness everywhere, of a grey-black crowd whose faces made me think of wintry sunlight. I had halted the troop; we were hemmed in, mobbed.

Someone caught my knee.

"Monsieur Malcolm, *mon Dieu!*"

I looked down into a yellow and deeply lined face, and recognized old Daudet who had kept the jeweller's shop.

"Where—?"

I felt strangely inarticulate.

He pointed.

"Yes—yes, up there, Rue du Château—Monsieur Reynaud's—"

I turned to Roberts; but Roberts had been watching me while the excited people surged round his horse.

"All right, sir, I'll carry on!"

I pushed my horse through the crowd into the steep Rue du Château.

How familiar it all was—the grey houses, the château rock, the hanging trees, the gold sign of the Hôtel Horn. There were the row of lime-trees by the doctor's house. Someone was pushing a big flag out of a window. I saw a girl in a blue apron running out of a doorway, waving her arms.

The grey street curved upwards—and then I saw Helene. She was standing quite still in the middle of the road, her hands folded over her bosom. The white thinness of her struck me, and her eyes like two great, dark circles. And her clothes—the fastidious Helene! Old yellow boots, a shabby black skirt, and an old pink jersey!

She stood there, staring, and then I saw her face change. It was like a dead woman coming to life. And I—I was out of the saddle and letting my horse do what it would.

"*Oh, mon chérie!*"

That was all she said. She just clung to me and pressed her smooth, black head against my neck, and I felt the quivering of her, and all the while I was full of a strange dream.

"Four whole years! Look at me, little wife."

She must have felt the dread in me and have understood it, for as we stood there clasping each other in that Belgian street she put her head back and looked into my face. Her eyes were deep and clean; they looked straight into mine without a shadow of concealment or of tragic self-consciousness.

"I'm well, *mon chérie!*"

"Thank God!" I said.

And then a quivering took her; her mouth grew poignant; she was feeling again all those humiliations, those silent struggles, those fears.

"I was fortunate, Leslie, more fortunate—than some. I managed—Some of them were kind. But there were times—"

Her head was down again, and I held her fast.

"Where have you been living?"

"With the Reynauds—four years. But they have been so kind. Josephine died two years ago. It was rather horrible—"

She shuddered; she was pouring things out, all the repressions, the ghastly carefulnesses.

"But the humiliations! They took my piano away. And they made us all sleep with our doors open. And for four years I have never been further than the 'place.'"

"I know," I said; "but that's all over. I'll make it up to you, or try to. And how is the house—our house?"

Her mouth quivered.

"I went up there just five weeks ago. I had not seen it for three years."

"Not seen it!"

"No; we were not allowed to go beyond the château gate. There were sentries. Besides, one kept to the house or garden."

"Anyhow, it's still there."

"Oh, yes!" And she smiled faintly. "They used it as some sort of headquarters. It might be worse. I want sunlight there, Leslie, and flowers, peaceful, innocent things. I'm—I'm so tired."

She collapsed suddenly in my arms, and I had to carry her into the Reynauds' house, where old Madame Reynaud, with her broad nose and her moustache, was shedding blessed tears, and old Reynaud, collarless and in his shirt sleeves, was twisting a corkscrew into the neck of a wine-bottle.

"She's been so brave!" said the woman.

Old Reynaud lugged at the corkscrew.

"Ha—ha, my boy—this is the day! She—she'll soon be all right. One must drink a little—what! *Vive* everybody! Yes—I had two dozen of these buried in my garden. The pigs never found them. *Mon Dieu*, what a day!"

There was a frost that night, and in the morning's sunlight that followed Helene and I walked up to Les Sapins, for that was the name we had given to our country house. Colonel Slattery had put me off duty for the day, and with Helene's arm in mine we climbed the hill past the château. The silver rime was melting from the tall spruces beside the road, and in the shadow of the hill the grass lay white. The day was very beautiful and still.

"It is difficult to believe it," said my wife.

She paused, holding me beside her.

"Don't—don't hope for too much, Leslie. The poor garden——"

"*Chérie*," I said, "gardens and houses are things that can be mended."

The house had been built on the southern slope of a hill, with a great wood of pines behind it, and as we turned into what had been our private lane, I saw the white gables and the high-pitched slate roof of the house shining in the sunlight against the dark tops of the pines. The house had an English atmosphere. Long and low, with white window frames and strong courses of brick between the stories, it looked out across a little terrace over rolling country that on this winter morning was all silver under the thin blue of the sky.

"The place looks much the same."

She pressed my arm. It seemed to me that she was making an effort to be brave, but that there was something that troubled her.

We passed through the gateway—that is to say, between the posts, for the gate had gone—and then I saw the derelict garden. It had been on the edge of completion before the War, but now it was a muck-heap, a squadge of mud and rubbish and dead shrubs and the stumps of felled trees. It was as though dozens of malicious men had set out with deliberation to destroy and to foul it.

"What on earth—— How did they come to make such an infernal mess?"

"Don't you understand?"

"They knew——"

"It belonged to an Englishman."

I was angry.

Helene held firmly to my arm, and as we came to the terrace I saw below it, on the middle of what had been the formal garden, a long, low mound of soil. A rough cross stood at one end of the mound. The Germans had left us a grave.

And it was a very recent grave, suggesting that someone had died in the house at the time of their hurried evacuation of Hochefort.

I glanced suddenly at Helene. Her face was white; it expressed horror and a determination not to give way to the feeling of horror, nor had I fully realized the full effect those years of strain had had upon her. She was like a gentle, hypersensitive child, and it was this grave that frightend her. She made herself look at it, and yet she shrank.

I purposely made light of it.

"Very kind of them to leave us that! I'll have it seen to. I suppose there is a German cemetery somewhere."

"Yes."

I could feel her trembling, and I turned towards the house.

"We'll soon put this right, *chérie*. How often I have thought of this dear place! It is going to be all that we dreamed of."

We stood at gaze, and I must confess that for some reason the house depressed me. It had a melancholy and almost furtive look on its white face. Many of the windows were broken, and the spaces filled with cardboard or sacking. The front door had lost nearly all its paint, and the lower panels suggested that the men who had used the house had kicked the door open with their boots. The terrace was littered with rubbish, tins, bottles, ashes, scraps of paper.

I fought back my feeling of depression, for I understood that my little wife had had enough to bear, and that her spirit needed my spirit arm, as her body seemed to need my body.

"Great idea!" I said. "The C.O. won't mind my using a fatigue party up here. Why not?"

We entered the house. The floors were indescribable; months of filth seemed to have been trodden into the boards. Plaster had been hacked down in places, leaving the laths showing like the ribs of a skeleton. The ceilings were black and scarred, as though generations of men had amused themselves by throwing their boots at them. In the little drawing-room stood a bed that had been purloined from some Hochefort house. The bedclothes were still rumpled on it. It looked a squalid, sinister bed.

And suddenly it struck me that the man buried out there had died in that bed.

I swept Helene out of the house with my arm round her waist.

"Well," I said, "it is something to be English. You are not coming up here again, *chérie*, until all this has been altered."

I drew her close and kissed her hair.

"I'll wipe out the bad dream. When next you see Les Sapins, it shall be a happy house."

The first thing that I did was to have that grave opened and the dead German

removed. There was no name on the cross, and the business left me an unpleasant memory. The man had been an officer, and he had been buried in his greatcoat, a big bull of a man with red hair visible above a face that did not bear looking at. The body was put in a shell and transferred to the little German cemetery. To the disinterment party I had handed out many francs and much tobacco.

"Well, that's that," I thought; "a nasty job done with." And from that day I never mentioned the grave to Helene.

The regiment went on to the Rhine, but I was demobilized in the March of 1919, and back in Brussels at my own work. My wife and I had a little flat in Brussels, but Les Sapins was to be our home where I could spend a long week-end. And Les Sapins was being transfigured.

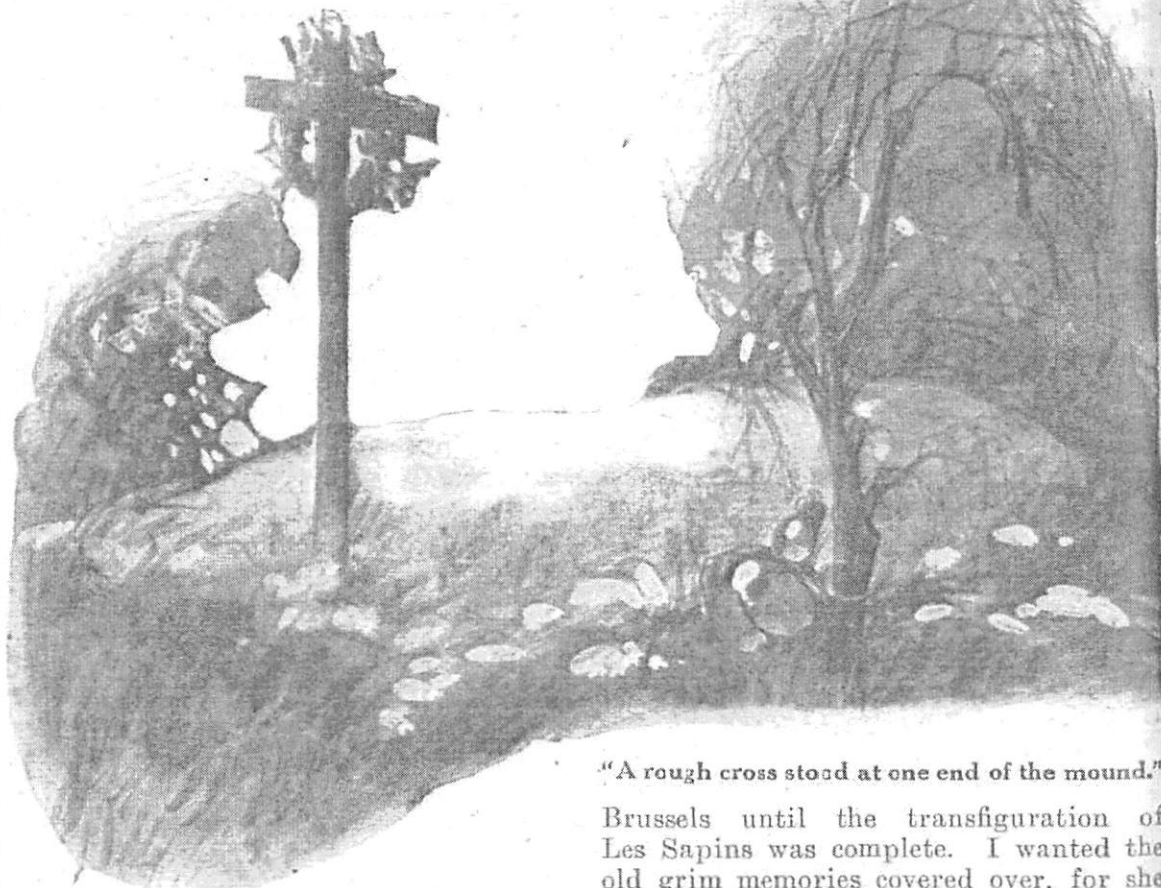
There were men at work in the garden and in the house, and I motored over

ing sleek and happy. I had hurried on a lot of spring planting, and had sent to England for roses and herbaceous stuff.

One May evening I stood on the terrace and felt happy.

"Next month," I thought, "we can settle in here. She won't know the place. Poor little woman!—she asked for sunlight and flowers."

Furniture was our only trouble. It was so monstrously scarce and dear that Helene and I decided to buy only the necessities, and to furnish the hall, one sitting-room and two bedrooms, and to leave the rest of the house till later. I had insisted on Helene remaining in



"A rough cross stood at one end of the mound."

every Saturday to see how the work was going forward. I was satisfied. The house was bright with new paint and paper, and the derelict garden was grow-

Brussels until the transfiguration of Les Sapins was complete. I wanted the old grim memories covered over, for she was still in a nervous state, not sleeping too well, though refusing to be pitied.

We enjoyed pottering about together, picking up our furniture, and I remember

being struck by a peculiar prejudice that I discovered in Helene. We had been discussing which of the two rooms we would finish—the dining-room or the drawing-room—and she chose the dining-room.

"It's brighter, more sun, more view," she said.

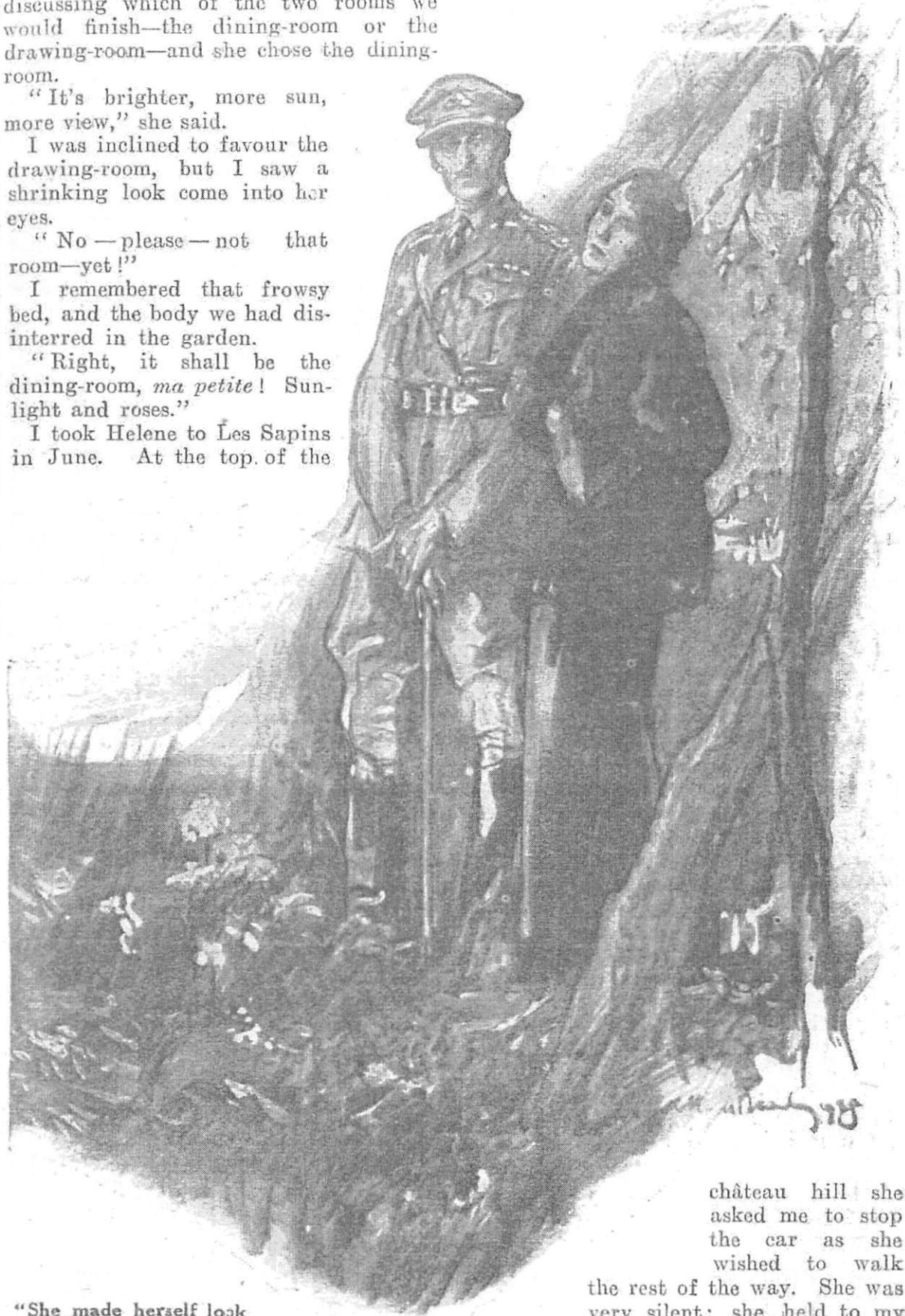
I was inclined to favour the drawing-room, but I saw a shrinking look come into her eyes.

"No — please — not that room — yet!"

I remembered that frowsy bed, and the body we had disinterred in the garden.

"Right, it shall be the dining-room, *ma petite*! Sunlight and roses."

I took Helene to Les Sapins in June. At the top of the



"She made herself look at it, and yet she shrank."

château hill she asked me to stop the car as she wished to walk the rest of the way. She was very silent; she held to my arm, and I think that I

understood what was passing in her mind. There were bad memories here, and deliberately she had got out of the car and faced these memories. Also, there is a gradualness in one's anticipations, and Helene's wish was to come gradually upon Les Sapins and not to have it flung at her suddenly.

I opened the new gate, and when she saw the garden with its clean turf and its roses, and the little terrace paved with stone, and the flowers growing in the crevices, she stood very still.

She held my hand. Her face had lost that rather worn look.

"It is beautiful——"

She put up her face to be kissed.

"Oh, my dear, thank you! You are giving me peace, peace."

I must confess that I was not one of those who suffered from post-war restlessness. I revelled in tranquillity. I bathed and floated in it, and every Friday evening I would get into my car and let myself be carried through leagues of evening coolness to Les Sapins. I loved the place. It sat with serene loveliness on its southern slope, sheltered by the encircling pines, and looking out over rolling, wooded country. On the Saturday I would get into old clothes and work in the garden. I seemed to come right down to the peace of the soil, and I wanted nothing better.

Yet, there was a shadow, and it began to deepen. Helene was not happy, or rather she was both happy and unhappy. It was as though she had something on her mind; I would catch her with a queer, listening look on her face, and sometimes her eyes looked haunted.

For a month she had seemed her old self, and then this atmosphere of dread and unrest had stolen over her.

I was worried.

I questioned her.

"What is troubling you, *chérie*?"

"Nothing."

"But there must be something."

She confessed that there was something.

"But I can't describe it," she said; "I can only liken it to a queer feeling of suspense. Something seems to happen here—something I cannot hear or see. It's as though——"

"Well?"

"As though someone—something had been left behind."

The following day Helene woke me

about three o'clock in the morning. She was sitting up in bed, trembling.

"Leslie, there is someone in the house."

"Where?"

"I am sure I heard footsteps—below—in the drawing-room."

I listened but could hear nothing, but she was so agitated, and so sure that she had heard the sound of footsteps, that I got out of bed, took an electric torch and a revolver from a drawer, and went down to explore. I found nothing. I looked into the empty drawing-room, which was under our bedroom, and my light showed nothing but the blank walls and the white-floor-boards.

I went back to Helene.

"Nothing, dear."

"But I am quite sure. I was not dreaming."

"We won't say anything to the servants."

"No."

"Try to go to sleep, little woman."

But I think she remained awake beside me for the rest of the night. On the Wednesday morning of next week I received a wire at Brussels.

"Please come at once."

In three hours I was at Les Sapins. I found my wife walking up and down the terrace with fear in her eyes. Yet she met me with a tense, white calmness; her self-control was like a tight cord knotted about a forehead.

She answered my anxious, questioning look.

"No, I'm not ill or mad, dear. But something has frightened me——"

She clung to me for a moment.

"It is cruel. This little house of ours—and after all that we have suffered! I was going to be so happy here."

"But what is it?"

She took me into the house and across the hall into the dining-room, and her movements were mysterious and purposeful. She left the dining-room door open and pushed a chair forward.

"Sit down there. Tell me what you see."

I sat down, and found myself looking through the doorway into the hall, and across it and through the open doorway of the drawing-room. I could see the white boards running to the fireplace.

"I can look into the drawing-room."

She stood behind my chair, her hands resting on the back of it.

"I was sitting here last evening—just where you are sitting. It was about sunset. Pauline had been scrubbing the drawing-room floor, and had left the door and windows open. I was reading—and suddenly I felt—felt strange—"

She put a hand to her forehead.

"I glanced through there. I saw a man standing in the drawing-room. His back was towards me. He was wearing a great, grey coat."

"You had heard no noise?"

"Nothing. And suddenly he began to walk up and down. He made no noise."

"What sort of man?"

"A German—a very big man, with a great, heavy face and red hair."

"Red hair!"

I felt the sudden, significant horror of the thing, for it seemed to me that she was describing the man who had been buried in our garden.

"What did he do?"

"He just walked up and down, as though he had lost something. His great red face looked tortured. His feet made no sound. And then—I suppose—I fainted—"

"And then—"

"When I came round there was nothing there—nothing."

I drew Helene on to my knees.

"You have the war-horror still with you, *ma chérie*. Something must be done. You can't stay here."

Her face was dolorous.

"But—I want to stay here. I love it—but for this horrible something."

I was scared for her sake, but my fear included a hot anger. These infernal Teutons! Were they going to spoil the peace of our home by leaving some sinister association behind them? I felt the lust to fight, to protect.

I went and locked the drawing-room door and pocketed the key.

"You had better come with me, dear."

She looked frightened.

"Where are you going?"

"To send a telegram and to see the Reynauds. Come—"

She asked no questions; she seemed ready to accept all that I planned and did, and when I told her that I was going to wire for Dr. Richet, she looked at me with pathetic candour.

"I'm not ill, Leslie."

"No, but the house is. Richet is interested in these things. We'll see."

I arranged with the Reynauds that Helene should sleep there for the next few nights, and then I went back to Les Sapins and examined the empty drawing-room. I could find nothing of any significance. It was just an unfurnished room with four walls, a window, a door, a fireplace, a ceiling and a floor. Yet it was a most extraordinary thing that Helene should have seen and described the very type of man who had been buried in the grave in the garden. Naturally I had never drawn for her a word picture of the man whom we had disinterred.

Next day Richet arrived. He was a big, quiet, black-bearded person, with a slow and happy smile, not the kind of man whom you would have suspected of being interested in spiritism. He heard all that I had to tell; he examined the room and went over the whole house. Also, he walked down to the Reynauds and saw Helene.

"She's psychic," he said to me on his return, "but she is quite normal. I shall spend the night in that room."

I offered to sit up with him, but he assured me that he would prefer to be alone.

I slept fairly well. When I got up in the morning and pulled back the curtains, I saw Richet standing on the lawn close to the place where the grave had been. His figure expressed complete tranquillity. He appeared to be enjoying the morning sunlight.

I dressed and joined him in the garden.

"Well, did you see anything?"

He answered me in his slow and deliberate way:

"No, but I felt something—a troubled presence. It came and it went. Yes, most definite."

He stroked his beard.

"After breakfast we'll search that room."

"But it is empty."

"It seems—empty."

When we returned to the room Richet stood by the door.

"Where was the bed?"

I pointed out the place. I saw his eyes fixed on the floorboards where the bed had stood. Then he went forward, stooping. He pointed.

"A board has been cut there."

"Has it?"

"With a very fine saw, and sawdust rubbed into the lines. Do you see?"

I did see, now that he pointed it out. Also, there were two faint dots.

"Putty," he said, "to hide screw holes, I think!"

I went for tools, and Richet knelt down and set to work. It was as he had suspected. A section of one of the boards had been cut, and when the two small screws were withdrawn and the piece of board lifted, I saw the top of a tin box.

Richet extracted it and raised the lid.

We had uncovered someone's hoard of loot, and the owner of the loot had made his collection with obvious discretion. There were rings, a box of loose stones, bank notes, a few gold louis. How the German had come by the stuff, whether he had annexed some Frenchman's or Belgian's hoard, we never knew.

Richet stood and meditated.

"Motives are queer things," he said.

"Now—supposing—that dead man's other self—is still earth-bound here, what is it that holds him?"

He looked at me with that deep smile.

"Is it the lingering of the old greed—is it remorse, a desire for restitution?"

I asked him what we should do.

"That is the problem," he said.

"Supposing we present—this—to some charity? It would be almost impossible to trace the owners. These material

things can be turned into love, pity, help. Anyway, the hoarder loses his hoard. And if it was remorse that held him here, we shall have done the best for him that we can."

And that was what we did. We made over the box of plunder to a society of Nursing Sisters, and when it had been done, Richet spent two nights in that empty room.

On the second morning he met me with a smile.

"I—felt—nothing."

He reflected.

"Furnish the room; make it bright and charming; and then bring your wife up here."

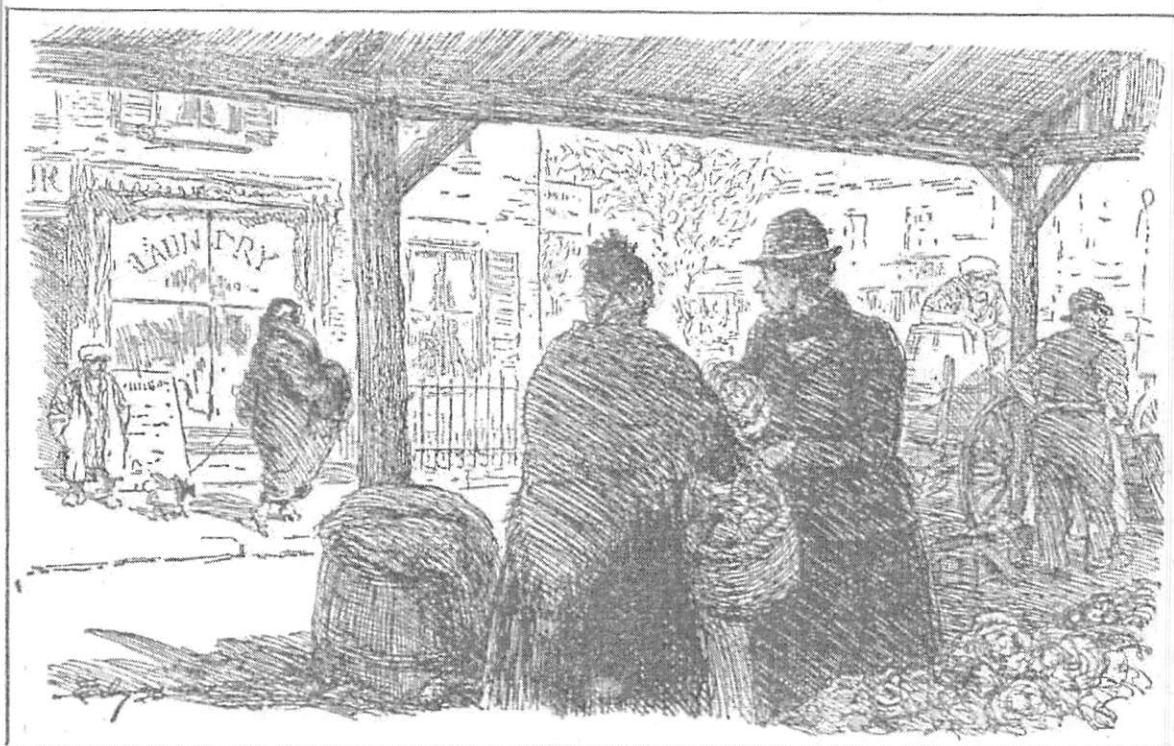
I followed his advice, and on one still September afternoon I brought Helene back to Les Sapins. We had told her everything.

"Richet says that it has gone."

She entered the house, and after standing in the hall for a moment, she entered the room where the man had died. I saw her face reflected in a mirror; it was calm, and a little expectant, and as I watched it I seemed to detect relief.

"It is different," she said.

And so it remained. Our home was our home. The spirit of that red-headed German had passed.



"There goes Mrs. Murphy—flauntin' the wealth her husband made contractin' fer the Council!"
 "Sure an' she ought to be ashamed—takin' the bread out of honest people's mouths an' puttin' it on her own back."



By WARWICK DEEPING

ARTIST AND ANGLER!—MAKING HER CHOICE: A LOVE STORY

ALL three were staying at the Haddon Arms, the man with the empty sleeve, the fisherman, and the widow.

The man with an empty sleeve had been there a month before the fisherman—Gerald Phipson—arrived in his big canary-yellow car and took the best bedroom and the only private sitting-room in the inn. Brook had a bedroom in one of the gables; it was a little cheaper and it had not been modernized. The widow came ten days after Phipson. She was given one of the rooms with lattice windows overlooking the garden, a room that smelt of honeysuckle.

They met at dinner on the night of her arrival—that is to say, they sat at separate single tables and were aware of each other in the dim old-fashioned room. There were about six other people staying at the Haddon Arms, two weather-beaten women who daily walked an incredible number of miles, an ex-civil servant and his wife who had fled from servant problems and a London flat, and a depressed looking invalid and her equally depressed looking companion. The widow observed them all. She had a detached and tranquil air. If she was piqued to the slightest interest in anybody it was by the man with the empty sleeve and by Gerald Phipson, late Lieut.-Col. T.F.

The two men were such contrasts: Brook, thin, intense, with the mouth of an ascetic, and hidden fires banked behind a sensitive reserve; Phipson, large, blond, handsome, with a roving blue eye, and a cheerfulness that was almost too cheery. The man with the empty sleeve had suffered; the other had suffered hardly at all.

Phipson was the popular man, lavish, all smiles. He had a way with him—even with waitresses and chambermaids.

"Where's my siphon of soda—Alice?"

His voice was large, confident and caressing. He appealed to the sex in women. The widow noticed that the waitress was always ready to bounce to his table and simper even when she handed him the greens. The Colonel was served, while Brook had to wait, and when the girl visited his table it was done brusquely and without any of that hoydenish graciousness which she showed to Gerald Phipson. The one-armed man never looked at her; her eyes were turned either towards the window or his plate.

If the widow found these two men interesting, they saw in her something arrestive. She was the sort of woman men cannot keep away from. She was not pretty; she seemed to cultivate a silent aloofness, but she had fine eyes and splendid hair. There was an essential grace and dignity about her; breed and poise, humour and wisdom in that long sensitive mouth.

Phipson discovered her at once, and in the midst of his soup. He stared with his spoon half-way between his plate and his lips.

"She's ugly," was his first impression.

A little later he felt that something in her which piqued the male. He realized that she was smart, that she had a jolly fine figure, and "topping" eyes.

Brook did not discover her till half-way through the meal. He looked at her once, fixedly and with intelligent intentness, and he did not look again.

Phipson was the first of the three to leave the dining-room. He went to the lounge, which was a glorified passage between the garden and the office and

private bar; he lit a cigarette, asked Mrs. Mumford for a liqueur, and took the opportunity of looking at the visitors' book which lay in the office window. Her name was there, written in a large and steady hand.

"Mrs. Rosamund Graham, London."

"Married," he thought; "a widow probably. Wonder if she plays bridge?"

He settled himself on the settee; it was the most central place in the lounge and the likeliest point from which a conversation might be initiated. Brook came in, nodded casually to the other man, and chose a chair that would place him as far from Phipson as possible. The two weather-beaten women wandered through and disappeared into the garden. The civil servant and his wife took the two arm-chairs opposite the settee, and began to complain about the dinner. Phipson had picked up a copy of *Country Life* and was reading the motoring news when Rosamund Graham appeared.

He was sitting in the middle of the settee, a very valuable strategical position. It justified his standing up, smiling, and making elaborate room for her. She acknowledged the courtesy with the faintest of faint smiles, sat down, produced a cigarette case and took out a cigarette. There were no matches in the lounge, and it appeared that she had forgotten her matchbox. Another opportunity for the squire of dames!

"Allow me."

He handed her a lighted match.

"Thank you."

The civil servant started up.

"May I have it—after you? These people are still playing the rationing game on us, you know, *Vide*—the meat at dinner."

Phipson laughed; he had a pleasant laugh, and the very thin ice of the immediate post-war period was broken. The four entered into conversation, the gossiping and half playful conversation that begins and ends in nothing. Mrs. Graham was the least responsive of the four. She smoked her cigarette and made occasional remarks when it was impossible for her to remain silent, but for the moment she was interested in something else. Brook, sitting apart in his corner, with a book upon his knees, was intent upon filling and lighting a pipe with that long fingered left hand of his. Rosamund Graham watched the operation, and the patient and skilful way he went about it. This simple act had pathos, character, though she suspected that the man in the corner would have resented pity.

Phipson, the skilful fisherman, threw flies to lure her towards a May-time flirtation. Did she fish? He had a bit of river here that was all that could be desired.

"I like the atmosphere of it—better than the actual fishing," she told him.

Phipson was a little vague on "atmosphere," but the idea was all right. Men were made to show off, women to look on.

He was playing the affair quite skilfully, but the ex-civil servant, one of those white, round-headed bores with a fixed grey eye and the intelligence of a Blue Book, had a passion for babbling. He knew nothing about fishing, and he spoilt Phipson's cast. He took a serious view of life, and he insisted on discussing it; that is to say, he was full to the brim with opinions on Bolshevism, Direct Action, and the stuffed horse we call democracy.

"Tell me, Colonel, when you were in France, wasn't fear the backbone of discipline?"

Phipson supposed that it was.

"When you were up in the trenches, in the mud, under shell fire, wasn't it fear that held the men together?"

The fisherman looked bored.

"Over there—things were so different, you know. It wasn't all so bad as people make out."

He made an attempt to shift the conversation, but the sociologist stuck to the Flanders mud. And then it struck the woman on the settee that the man beside her was vaguely uncomfortable—and she wondered why. His blue eyes looked irritable, almost shifty. It occurred to her that like many Englishmen he was shy of talking about the war and his experience in it; the thing was "bad form." Perhaps he wanted to forget.

She respected certain reticences. Had she not lost a young husband on the Somme, a husband to whom she had been married just three weeks?

Then, her attention was attracted to the man with the empty sleeve. He was listening. His eyes seemed full of vivid, sombre things.

"That's all wrong," he said suddenly, and then looked annoyed with himself for having spoken.

The sociologist turned on him. Here was an argument!

"You don't think it was fear," he said.

"If it wasn't fear, what was it?"

He was brusque and badger headed. The one-armed man frowned.

"You weren't there, sir," he said, quite gently.

"No—that was the misfortune of age. But I think I have a live witness. The Colonel here agreed with me that fear was the cement that kept the army—all the armies—together."

He glanced across at Phipson.

"Wasn't that so, Colonel?"

The fisherman fidgeted. He looked at the toes of his boots.

"Discipline—yes, discipline."

The sociologist turned triumphantly and aggressively to Brook. "There you are," said his eyes; "what do you make of that?"

The one-armed man ignored him. He was looking at Phipson.

"I grant you discipline," he said, "but the discipline of the best man triumphs over fear. Besides, did anyone ever save your life?"

Phipson glanced at him under heavy, suspicious eyelids. "Well—not quite that."

"Someone saved mine," and his eyes went suddenly to Mrs. Graham's face; "my servant. He was killed just when he had got me back, and his dead body lay on my legs for an hour. One does not forget that sort of thing. You'll excuse me, but when I hear people talking of fear and leaving out the finer stuff, I get a bit touchy. And whenever I get worried about things, I remember how that dead boy lay on my legs—"

Mrs. Graham nodded, and her smile had a suggestion of hidden tears. But Brook got up and went out into the garden.

Perhaps there was an inevitableness in Rosamund Graham's attraction for these two men, though she made no attempt to attract either of them, and even was casual to Phipson. He had imagined a flirtation and found himself involved in an affair that was serious. The essential grace and dignity piqued the snob in him, for Gerald Phipson asked for two things in his future wife—that she should be desirable to him and that she should be the sort of woman whom a rich and ambitious man likes to marry. She was arrestive and distinguished. She would look well in the house he meant to have and as the figure-head of the life he meant to live.

He attacked at the gallop, gallantly, romantically, and had he been a hero on the films he would have sent thrills through all suburbia. He was the real gentleman; he had such a way with him; he was so big and male, with little wavy kinks in his hair. Moreover, he was rich.

Brook looked on.

He, too, had been attracted by Rosamund Graham and far more forcibly than had Colonel Phipson. It was probable that she felt it and that she knew, for Brook had sought her out and talked to her in his shy, fierce way; but when this other man became so strenuously gallant he shrugged his shoulders and kept away. Brook had good cause to be shy of women. The girl who was to have married him had looked at that empty sleeve and decided that an artist who had lost his right arm was not a sound investment. She had married someone else, a man of the same type as Phipson.

Brook's pride was fierce. He did not mean to test a woman a second time. It appeared to him that Mrs. Graham was pleased with Phipson, and he disliked Phipson so thoroughly that he had no desire to compete with him.

"I suppose women like that sort of man."

He left it at that, and went out daily with his artist's paraphernalia into a world of beauty and of loneliness.

In fact he had gone back to school. Patiently, bravely and with infinite labour he was educating that left hand of his, training it from its first maddening, smudgy clumsiness to the delicate poise of the hand he had lost. In the early days he had almost despaired, but the passion of the painter was in him; it had to come out. He had a small pension, enough to scrape along on. He lived like an ascetic.

He was painting in the fir woods above Haddon Cross when Mrs. Graham discovered him. It was not coincidence and it was not chance. She found him at the end of a glade, sheltered by a bank of gorse, with a mass of broom burning in the sunlight beyond the shadows of the trees. He had had some sort of arm rest fixed to his easel. He was so absorbed that she was able to come quite close without his realizing her nearness.

And for five minutes or so she watched him at his work with an interest that was inspired by a feeling that was deeper and richer than curiosity. She understood what he was doing, and appreciated the courage and the fineness of it.

Presently she made a little detour and approached him so that he should see her coming as from a distance. She saw him glance at her; his eyes watched her intently for a moment. Then he went on with his work.

She drew towards him slowly. She contrived to give the coincidence a naturalness that would offend neither his reserve nor her pride.

"You must like doing that again"—and she smiled.

His eyes lit up, but he did not smile.

"Well—naturally. It's my job."

She looked at his work, and he felt that

it pleased her.

"Tell me, you were not left-handed, were you?"

"No," he said; "no."

She sat down on the low grass bank by the furze, and Brook went on painting. Her presence there disturbed him, and disturbed him most strangely, but he would not allow it. He remembered, too, that Phipson was away on business, and it was possible that she had nothing to do.

The silence began to bother him. If she was going to sit there he would rather that she talked.

"Plenty of colour here," he observed. She looked at his intent face and figure; the whole of him seemed concentrated in that left hand.

"Yes, to those who can see it. Do you remember a little exhibition of pictures you had in the Mortimer Galleries before the war?"

He remembered it very well, so well that he stopped painting and half turned on his stool.

"Yes, 1914."

"I bought a little thing of yours—there. You had painted a glade in the pinewoods—almost exactly like this one here. I think it is wonderful"—and she nodded at his canvas.

He considered her with ardent eyes.

"It must have been such a tragedy to you, but you are getting it back."

"You think so?" he asked.

"Yes. And I can imagine what it must have cost you."

"Yes, it was a stiff business," he said, and went on painting.

She did not move; she seemed in no hurry to leave the grass bank under the shelter of the furze bushes, and in a little while her nearness ceased to worry him. His consciousness of her presence had a peculiarly stimulating effect upon his work: he felt that she was not there to be amused; they were in sympathy; they were happy together.

"I was rather interested in what you said the other day in the lounge."

He was looking down the glade, studying some light effect among the trees.

"About the war?"

"Yes. The coincidence was rather curious."



"Yes, it was a stiff business," he said, and went on painting.

Your servant was killed while saving you; my husband was killed while saving his servant."

"How queer!" he said; "where was it?"

"Fricourt."

"Why, I was hit at Contalmaison."

They were silent for a while, and then she asked him a question which astonished him.

"There is something about Colonel Phipson that puzzles me. Have you noticed anything?"

He became very intent upon his work.

"No," he said; "no—I can't say I have."

And there the matter ended.

They walked back through the woods together to the inn, and before they reached it Brook had realized that this woman had a very wonderful meaning for him. She seemed different, fatally different, from any other woman he had ever met. And he became self-conscious, awkward.

"You paint—yourself—don't you?" he asked her.

"In a very amateurish way."

"Why not try that glade to-morrow?"

She hesitated a moment before replying.

"I'd love to. But I have promised to go fishing with Colonel Phipson."

She saw his face close like a book.

"It's a promise," she said, "or I would break it. Let us see: to-morrow is Wednesday; on Thursday I am spending the day in town. May it be Friday?"

"Just as you please."

They had reached the gateway of the inn garden.

"If I begin painting," she said as she entered the gate, "I shall not have to go fishing again. Thanks for the excuse."

"Not at all," he answered, feeling distraught and mystified.

Next morning he saw her drive off with Phipson in his yellow car. She was laughing, and her laughter angered him. Yet what right had he to be angry because she laughed? Fool of an egotist! If the other man could make her laugh, was not that something to his credit?

Brook went out and painted hard all day, but his work did not please him. This woman's face kept drifting between him and the canvas.

Five miles away Gerald Phipson was trying to make love to Mrs. Graham, and finding her tantalizing and elusive. He had brought a luncheon hamper with him, a very elaborate hamper, and they sat in the shade of an old thorn tree above

the softly flowing river. It was not a good fishing day, but Phipson had not come out to fish.

He was very sure of his conquest, for scores of women had been ready to marry him; but Mrs. Graham was not quite like any other woman he had met, and on this particular day she seemed to be the victim of an irritating obsession: she would talk of nothing but the war. He found himself being questioned, and her questions annoyed him even more than she suspected.

"I suppose you were in France?"

He led her to understand that he was in France.

"My husband was killed on the Somme. Wasn't it a very ghastly business?"

He seemed a little restive, and she noticed a glint of temper in his blue eyes.

"I missed the Somme. But look here, dear lady, let's be more cheerful. I make a point of not talking about the life out there."

She looked at him queerly.

"Modesty. I can understand that."

"No, it's just bad form; it bores people; it's not done."

She laughed, though he did not guess what it was that had amused her, and he accepted her laughter as one of the symptoms of surrender. They spent the afternoon in a little desultory fishing; he made love to her and she did not rebuff him. "I have only to ask her," he thought; "she'll marry me all right." But he was a fisherman, a hunter; he liked the play, the zest of pursuit; he could ask her to-morrow or the next day, and he did not hurry.

Brook was sitting in the garden, reading, when the yellow car pulled up outside the gate.

"What a melancholy bird!" said Phipson. "I can't help feeling sorry for the fellow."

Her eyes seemed innocent.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh—well—you know—what fun does he get out of life?"

"I wonder!" she said. "I wonder!"

She lunched at her club next day, and she did not lunch alone. Her guest was a rather celebrated person, and he was also her uncle. He had a white head, the face of a good-natured but mischievous eagle, and an eye-glass that focused everything from a woman's ankles to the amount of wave in her hair. He was one of the best dressed men in London, and as he sat and sipped his sherry and looked across the table at his niece his eyes twinkled and approved.

"I'm flattered," he said.

She laughed.

"And so am I. It is such an ordeal lunching with you. I feel I'm on parade—with the King inspecting the guard of honour."

"Do you?" he said. "You come through it very well."

They were drinking their coffee and smoking cigarettes when she asked him a casual question.

"Uncle Rupert, you know everybody that ever was: did you ever come across a Colonel Phipson when you had that inspectorship during the war?"

His white eyebrows seemed to bristle. "Phipson? Wait a minute. A big, brawny, handsome young scoundrel?"

"Yes—that does describe him."

Her uncle looked rather fierce.

"Oh, yes—I remember the chap. I had to inspect his depot, etc., once or twice. I was not particularly gentle with him."

"Was he in charge of a depot?"

"Yes."

"Did he go abroad?"

"No."

"Why?" she asked.

He told her the reason, and for the moment she would not believe him.

"But—that's impossible!"

"My dear Rose," he said, "you don't know your England. It's our shame and our glory."

"But the gross inconsistency of it—the injustice!"

He smiled at her.

"That is why we are what we are. We are so conveniently blind at times."

At dinner Mrs. Graham was at her little table in the dining-room of the Haddon Arms. She smiled at Brook as he came in, and he paused to speak to her.

"Have you had a good day?"

"Splendid. You are going to let me inflict myself on you to-morrow?"

He looked at her questioningly, with a touch of fierceness.

"It will not be an infliction. But you are quite sure?"

He glanced towards the door, and she saw Phipson entering. She understood.

"Quite sure," she said; "if you will allow me I will make the excuse permanent."

Brook passed on, and Phipson came to her table, bending over her with the tenderness and the complacency of the assured victor.

"Had a good time?"

"Oh—quite pleasant, thank you. I was lunching with my uncle, General Paris. I think you knew him slightly?"

Her voice was casual and rather louder than usual. She looked him straight in the eyes as he bent over her with that smirk of ownership on his handsome face. She saw his eyes grow dull like metal that has been breathed upon.

"Yes—I think we did meet."

She smiled.

"My uncle was telling me how very valuable you were during the war, and how they could not possibly let you out of England. I suppose you still play football?"

He looked at her; she had given him the lash in the face. Then he said something quite foolish—walked across to his own table and sat down. He sat the meal through with a sort of stubborn, flushed fury, and when she rose and went out he followed her. So did Brook.

Phipson overtook her at the end of the lounge, just as she was passing out into the garden.

"Rosamund," he said.

She turned and looked at him quite calmly, a look which the most material of men could not misunderstand.

"I beg your pardon?"

He wilted. She kept her place there in the doorway until Phipson drew back. Fumbling with a match-stand on one of the tables he became aware of a sudden change in the expression of her eyes. She was looking at someone else, welcoming some other spirit that was in sacred sympathy with her own.

He saw Brook pass by. Her smiling eyes looked straight into his. They went out together into the garden.

The two weather-beaten women, wandering in the dusk, heard this most queer conversation on the other side of an old yew hedge.

"They would take an artist's hand and sacrifice it, but because a man could play tricks with a bit of leather——"

"You mean—they kept him at home for that?"

"It is a fact. There was a rather famous army team playing football during the war."

A man's laugh, strange and deep, seemed to deny that the affair filled him with any bitterness.

"He had his choice. I suppose some of us—like old Ridley—are born to put our hands into the fire."

"But it was fine of you."

"Not a bit. I couldn't help it—any more than I can help——"

The two weather-beaten women exchanged glances, and gently slipped away.

6

Conflict

By Warwick Deeping

"I have had to give it up, John. I could not bear it any longer."
 "She looked into his loyal eyes, and seeing all that was waiting for her there, she broke down and wept."
 "Oh—I have tried! I want peace—John, peace, the right to be myself in some quiet place. I'm all torn and dishevelled—"
 "He drew the curtains across the window, and kneeling down, held her head against his shoulder."



It began when John Backhouse and Richard Ensor were boys.

Cousins, Backhouse, like Vulcan lame on one leg, Ensor, a mocking Mercury with winged sandals, they came back to Oldbury from their respective public schools, and met and quarrelled as cousins will. It inhered in

each family. Robert Ensor, tall, lean, wolf-like, with his flaming head and pale blue eyes, would strut like a scornful chanticler in the presence of Tom Backhouse.

"Poor old Tom! Just like an owl sitting on a pill-box!"

What Dr. Thomas Backhouse thought of Bob Ensor need not be chronicled, but whenever he looked at the steeple of Wanbridge Church—an Ensor creation—and saw the red gilt cock of the weather-vane, it seemed to him that Bob Ensor had placed himself up there, a crowing creature.

As for the boys, no holiday passed without its culminating quarrel. Mercury was the aggressor. Slow, solemn John, big-headed, limping, was pricked and flicked until he reacted. Their actual clashes were Parthian affairs, a swift smack in the face, a throwing of rotten apples, with Dick Ensor, head in air, dancing away from the lame boy.

"Old Dot and Carry One, old Bughouse!"

Swift and elusive on his thin and springing legs he would mock the slower boy, dodging in and out with quick quirks and turns of the head.

"I'll smash you, Dick."

"Smash me! You old tortoise! I'll be somebody before you have started."

At seventeen Mercury ceased growing. He was the finished creature, precocious, slim, restless. His very hair was restless, all black kinks and little wiry curls. Vulcan filled out to carry his big head. Deep of chest, with strong arms and shoulders, his eyes looked at life with the seriousness of simplicity. Solemn John! Honest John! Bob Ensor, considering Tom Backhouse's boy, would screw up his blue eyes and feel facetious.

Jack would climb no beanstalk. Beanstalks were for the Ensor child.

Later—it was at the end of the summer holidays—their quarrel grew serious, and a girl was involved in it. It happened among the beeches on the downs beyond the river, for the three of them—Backhouse, Ensor and Sybil Arkwright—had taken a boat and a tea-basket and rowed downstream.

"Let's have tea in the woods, and light a fire."

It was Ensor's cry. He looked at the girl, who was steering. He had been making droll grimaces at her over old John's shoulder.

"Yes, let's," said she.

So they landed. There had been no open clash this summer, for both lads were on the edge of manhood, and the hands of seventeen are not

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the hands of twelve. But there was tension between them, rivalry, with the dark eyes of Sybil watching.

"Oh, don't argue so—you two."

They were arguing about the fire, or it would be fairer to say that Ensor was playing the autocrat, and Backhouse opposing him with a good-tempered but stubborn shoulder. There was a scramble for a box of matches. Ensor got the box, but Backhouse got Ensor's wrist. They stood staring at each other, and breathing hard—and perhaps Backhouse's grip was stronger than he knew.

"Leave go."

"Drop the box."

"You slovenly beast. You might at least cut your finger-nails."

Backhouse's good-tempered face grew flushed.

"You'll drop that box."

Sybil, kneeling and laying out tea-cups and cake on a white cloth, looked up at them with scared eyes.

"Oh—don't—Jack! Let go."

"Tell him to cut his finger-nails, Sybil, before he starts ragging."

In the scuffle the young maleness of each grew hot and hasty, opposing will to will. It might have ended as a scuffle had not young Ensor lost his temper and struck his cousin in the face. After that it was a battle of two young stags, with the girl shrinking and calling on them to stop.

"Jack—Dick, oh—don't! What beasts you are."

It ended as abruptly as it had begun, with Dick Ensor lying with his head among the tea-things, and a little trickle of blood showing on the white cloth. Backhouse stood and stared, the wrath in his blue eyes changing to wonder. Ensor made no effort to get up.

"Sorry, Dick!"

But Backhouse was never to forget what happened next: Sybil on her knees, with a scared white face, pulling Ensor's head into her lap.

"Oh, you've hurt him, Jack—you cruel beast."

She began to weep, and Backhouse, standing there and staring at them both, felt strangely wounded.

II

BACKHOUSE never forgot, and Ensor never forgave. In the years that followed, the increasing brilliance of the one and the plodding progress of the other were more and more contrasted. Ensor went up to Oxford; Backhouse became a student at Bart's. Ensor's future seemed incalculable, a pyrotechnic prospect; John Backhouse saw his future before him as a plain high road, for his father was growing old and needed a young partner.

That there should have been rivalry between these two was natural, but it need not have been bitter, nor would it have been so but for Ensor's merciless vanity and the face of Sybil Arkwright. The lives and the work of the two men would have diverged, but the hands of Sybil linked them together.

It was Backhouse who suffered. He loved Sybil; Ensor loved himself and desired Sybil because Backhouse wanted her. Never did he forget his splurge among the tea-things under the Oldbury beeches; it was a little red, sore streak in his vanity, a humiliation to be wiped away.

"Baiting the old bull!"

That was how he thought of his cousin, and his active and brilliant self-love lost no opportunity of expressing itself. Ensor made opportunities, he was Harlequin; Backhouse the clown.

"Come on, old Jack, and play tennis."

He could make the big, lame fellow look a fool at tennis, but he did it so guilefully that a woman's heart was not offended. He spoke of Backhouse to Sybil with easy compassion. "Poor old John. His brain limps a bit—like his leg. But what a good sort!"

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Backhouse had just been ploughed in an exam. Ensor tendered his sympathy behind a yew hedge in the Arkwrights' garden, knowing that there were ears on the other side of the hedge.

"Hard luck, old chap; you'll do it next time."

It was Backhouse who suffered. He was one of those quiet, warm-hearted fellows, deliberate, rather slow in speech, not a little inarticulate. He was quite without malice. He had no more irony than a child. Ensor's brilliancies left him staring; the stabs seemed so innocent and impulsive; it was just Ensor's way. He could never bring himself to believe that all these harlequin tricks were venomously deliberate. But he suffered. Because Sybil Arkwright mattered to him, as a particular woman matters to a man like Backhouse, and because it became increasingly obvious that Ensor mattered to Sybil. It was as though he fascinated her with his uptilted, sailing, handsome head, with the wicked fun in his gipsy black eyes, his wit, his flamboyance, his sparkle. John, poor clown, stood and stared, while harlequin capered. Always, Ensor seemed between them, making the slow Saxon look a dumb fool.

If there was an argument among a party of young things on some summer lawn under the trees, it was Ensor who had the best of it. He was a mighty talker, quicksilver, a master of words.

"You are a hundred years behind the times, old son. Bergson—poof! Ever heard of Behaviourism?"

Backhouse hadn't.

But the subject did not matter. Had they argued about plum-pudding Backhouse would have been worsted. Ensor would have spitted him while he was attempting to count the currants.

Yet, Backhouse was not bitter. He might feel sad, and did. He allowed Ensor his brilliancy; he distrusted it, and was perhaps a little afraid of it, for Sybil's sake.

For to John Backhouse Sybil was unique, a dusky thing with a warm pallor, and two dark eyes swimming in the round softness of her face. His memory of her went back years. He could see Sybil the child running up the castle hill with her black hair streaming, the full red lips of her large mouth parted over white teeth. Sybil cuddling a kitten. Sybil, tender-eyed, day dreaming under the trees. Sybil in her first red evening frock, a creature so exquisite that the man in him had felt afraid. And always Dick Ensor had come crowing in between them like a sort of fatal Peter Pan.

There were times when he hated Richard Ensor, and hated himself for his own hatred. Of course Dick would appeal to a woman, but Backhouse had felt like asking God that Sybil should not be that woman. His slowness distrusted Ensor's swiftness. Often he had a feeling that Sybil had to be saved from some vague and shadowy unhappiness.

But what could he say or do? He was shy in her presence; he could not blurt out his heart to her, and as to warning her against Ensor, why, that would be a cad's trick. She would think him jealous, which he was.

It happened, but not as he had dreamed it would happen. It was the month of May, and Backhouse was at Oldbury for a week, and had taken a great solid book on surgery out to the beech woods above the river. He lay and smoked and read, ruffling up his brown hair as though the ruffling of it helped him to get the facts into his head. He happened to glance down at the river and saw a punt rounding the corner above Plashet Mill. A girl was lying on the cushions, a man handling the pole. Sybil and Dick Ensor!

Backhouse bit hard on the stem of his pipe. He tried to fasten his consciousness to the pages of his book, only to find himself reading the same line over and over again. "Apart from complications union

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may be expected in about six weeks." Would those two drift by and not see him? He did not want them to see him.

In the punt Ensor stood balancing the pole, a smile on his face.

"Hallo, there's old John. We must tell him the news, Sybil——"

"No, not now——"

"Why not? I must tell people. Darling, I'm so furiously happy."

He poled the punt towards the bank, and she rose on her cushions with a look of breathlessness.

"Dick — please — not with me — here."

"Good Heavens—why not? I'm as proud as Punch. Hallo, John—you old stuffer—John——"

She sat helpless, inwardly flinching, conscious of the triumphant moment as Ensor saw it, and as Backhouse would be made to see it.

"Don't, Dick——"

"Gemini, but you are a coy thing! John, come down here; news, my lad, great news——"

Backhouse looking down at them, got up, and went limping slowly down. "Like an old ox to the slaughter," as Ensor put it to the crowing egotism of his mercurial self.

"John, old man—Sybil and I are engaged. Congratulate us."

Backhouse looked dully at the water weeds.

"I'm glad," he said.

The only one of the three who smiled was Ensor.

III

Two years passed and many things happened.

Red Ensor was dead, and so was his wife. Richard Ensor had published a small volume of poems, and was living in London as one of the young lights of the new world. John Backhouse had joined his father. Sybil was still Miss Arkwright, and wondering why, for Dick Ensor—the swift—seemed strangely slow in the collecting of a home.

But she was happy, or would not allow that she was unhappy. Her love for Ensor was more complex than she knew; she was patient with him; his sensuous mouth was so persuasive; he knew how to lay his head in a woman's lap. He could wait for the mother milk of her sympathy like a babe.

"I want you, Sybil."

She was waiting to give him herself and all that she possessed, but why was he delaying?

Oh, he had schemes, ambitions. He had inherited some seven thousand pounds from his father, and money was your opportunity. He was writing a novel, yet—he thought it a very good novel, and he was contemplating joining young Gerrard, who had founded a publishing business.

"But I'm rather a sly bird, Sybil. I want to be sure that Gerrard's ship is well afloat before I sail in it. Besides, you will be in it too."

He knew how to kiss and to temporize.

"Rather a cunning idea—being a publisher and a novelist all in one breath. Be able to blow your own trumpet."

She believed that he would need no trumpet. She was wholeheartedly proud of him.

"I want to help you, Dick. I shall have to write to all the enthusiastic people who will be asking for your autograph."

He laughed.

"You will have to keep me in order. Apply the ice, what! But look here, Sybil, why not September? We'll go to Italy——"

"Yes, September. Oh, my dear, I'm so much yours."

He patted her shoulder. Good girl—of course she was his. It should be her delight to admire him.

Good and bad thoughts go in and out of houses, and the doctor's house in Lombard Street, standing so square and red, with a high garden wall on one side of it and the green yard doors on the other, had a face just like old Thomas Backhouse's,

By Warwick Deeping

red and square and kindly. Its white cornice corresponded to the old man's fine white hair. Now that his son was with him old Tom did no work after lunch, but would sit and smoke his pipe at one of the Georgian windows. Lombard Street had houses only on one side of it, and the Backhouse windows looked across the green hollow in which the river ran to the downland with its beech woods, bracken, and old thorn trees. That was one picture, a masterpiece, centuries old; but if Dr. Backhouse put his face close to the glass and looked to the right he could see chimneys and zig-zags of corrugated iron, and dismal stretches of brick. Progress inhabited Farrow's Flats. It had been progressing down there ever since Isaac Farrow had built his foundry seventy years ago.

John Backhouse saw these same pictures, but he saw them differently. The war period had brought more chimneys, more smoke, more iron roofs, more rather sinister, sallow and undersized people to Farrow's Flats. It was the same English window, but a different England. At this very window John and his father had grown to know each other more solidly on certain sorrowful occasions, and the son could remember that rather bitter day when he had seen Red Ensor leaning in and crowing at Dr. Thomas.

"Hear your boy has been ploughed again, Tom. I'm sorry."

Afterwards John had gone in and stood by his father's chair.

"I'm sorry old Ensor could say that to you, pater. It shan't happen again."

"All right, Jack. I was ploughed once or twice myself. We Backhouses are slow starters, but we stick when we do get there."

Stubborn, unbrilliant John had become a part of the place. His lameness and his long plodding had made him older than his years. Moreover, he had suffered and still suffered because of a woman.

Why did not Ensor marry Sybil and take her away? Almost it was as though Ensor wished to keep his triumph dangling in front of his cousin's eyes.

Backhouse went stolidly on. There was a Backhouse tradition in Oldbury, and John took it up where his father had left it, and people had begun to discover that it was in strong and capable hands. It was the tradition of the healer, shrewd, patient, deliberate and kind, thinking more of the job than of the money, helping young children into the world, and helping old children out of it. Oldbury began to look more closely at the new Backhouse. It beheld a plain, blue-eyed, ruddily brown man with a massive head, who gave you an impression of heaviness until you looked into his eyes. They were very kind eyes, of a clear dark-blue. People who were in pain or in trouble were glad to look into those eyes.

But to Richard Ensor, his cousin was still the clown, a limping, clumsy figure, a dull creature in whose flanks the barbs of his wit could be planted. Scorn implies fear, and ever since that fight under the beeches Ensor had feared his cousin's mere physical strength. Certainly there was nothing else in John to fear, but Ensor did not forgive.

Triumphant, he none the less liked the pose of a foot on an enemy's neck. His vanity crowed. He laughed at John as a doctor, as a man, as a lover; he laughed at John in his motor-car, at the size of John's hats, at John's name on the brass door-plate.

"John Backhouse, Surgeon! Old John would have done better with a barber's pole."

He flew down to Oldbury for occasional week-ends, staying with the Arkwrights, seeing himself as Oldbury's celebrity, its brilliant young man. He liked fluttering the Oldbury doves. Always he would drop in casually upon the Backhouses, and smoke a cigarette,

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and exhale a subtle perfume of superiority. He kept up the cousinly attitude. He was the one person who could reduce old Tom Backhouse to unsmiling and testy silence.

"Just like his father. Black instead of red. I'm sorry for that girl."

So was the son, but he dared not say so, nor was he quite sure that he had any cause to feel sorry for Sybil.

That July Dick Ensor put his foot for the last time upon his cousin's patient neck. He strolled in one evening after dinner.

"I say, John, old man, Sybil and I are being married in September. I want you to be my best man."

Backhouse, standing by one of the Georgian windows, and filling a pipe, looked across the river at the green domes of the beech trees.

"All right," he said.

Ensor smiled upon him.

"Thanks; you'll do it like a father. I'll tell Sybil. We are going to Italy. My novel comes out at the end of October. I shall be back for the publication."

Backhouse lit his pipe. He was thinking—a little grimly, that Sybil's happiness was of more importance than Ensor's novel, but he did not say so to his cousin.

IV

RICHARD ENSOR enjoyed his own marriage. No bashful bridegroom he, but a young man who stood head in air, smiling upon the world. Beside him John Backhouse, confronting an ordeal and conquering it, watched for the one woman in the world, and thought how strange it was that for him there should be no other woman like her.

Ensor, bending gallantly over a front pew to be congratulated by a lady of quality, was touched on the shoulder.

"She is coming, Dick."

She came. She did not look once

at Backhouse, but afterwards in the vestry she put up a sudden face to be kissed. She looked frightened.

"Dear old John."

He kissed her.

"I'm here—always. Ready to do anything."

Her eyes had a mistiness.

"I believe you are. But I am going to be happy, happy—"

Did she doubt it? He wondered, for it seemed to him that that cry of hers was meant to smother the wailing of an infant doubt.

"Of course you are going to be happy, dear."

They went on to the Arkwrights' house for hand-shakings and chatter and music and champagne. Ensor might have been the bride, or a royal person receiving courtiers, keeping a dutiful and devoted wife as an accessory and at his elbow. Obviously he considered that it was he who mattered, and Backhouse, glooming cheerfully in the crowd, and keeping a responsible eye on his watch and on the chief performers, felt a sudden desire to twist Ensor's neck.

Later, a few words passed between the two men, when Backhouse had taken Ensor upstairs to change for the journey. The couple were catching the night boat from Dover.

"Be kind to Sybil, Dick."

Ensor turned swiftly.

"Good old John! Half prig—half parson."

Backhouse smiled in his cousin's eyes.

"Just as you like. I don't mind. But I would rather you made her happy."

V

BACKHOUSE had been up half the night with a difficult case, and coming down from a bath and a shave he picked up his letters from the sideboard. His post included a book neatly tied up in brown paper, and bearing a publisher's address label.

By Warwick Deeping

Backhouse opened the parcel as he sat down to his porridge. Old Dr. Thomas, reaching for the toast rack, was struck by the expression on his son's face.

"Had a bad night, Jack?"

"A forceps case, pater."

He was holding a book in his hands, a copy of Dick Ensor's novel—"Temptation." It had opened at the fly-leaf, and there on the nice white page Ensor had used red ink, as though black ink was not sufficiently suggestive: "To old Parson John, from Richard and Sybil Ensor." Backhouse closed the book and laid it beside his plate, and his father, kindly wise, asked no superfluous questions.

It was but another of Ensor's crowings, a smack from Harlequin's lath, but Backhouse the man was not Backhouse the boy. Oldbury might be chattering about Richard Ensor's first novel, but it was not the part of Oldbury that mattered to John Backhouse. For to old Tom Backhouse's son had come a gradual and sure consciousness of himself and his work, that work that he loved, and loving it, found it good. He mattered to Oldbury. Young Backhouse was to the suffering part of Oldbury what Old Backhouse had been, and even more so. In two years the younger man had built up a reputation that was not a thing on paper, but sure and solid, founded upon the craft and the kindness of a born healer, for that was what John Backhouse was. Loving his work he had grown to a gradual bigness in it, a deliberate, strong, gentle man, full of unexpected sympathies and understandings. It was as though his very lameness had helped him to climb the cliff of human wisdom. Women trusted him. It seemed that he understood them. He had a big and happy way with fractious children.

And it was into the pool of this quiet workaday life that Richard Ensor pitched the copy of his novel. It made a malicious splash, and

then—all was calm again. John Backhouse went out to his day's work.

"Temptation" was put away unread on a shelf, and through all the press of the winter's work Backhouse gave hardly a thought to his cousin's book. He did not even know that Ensor's novel had failed. Ensor had spent two hundred pounds of his own money in advertising "Temptation"; he had sent presentation copies to useful men; he had given dinners to possible critics. And yet the Press had made little of the book; it sold exactly thirteen hundred and thirty-seven copies.

But Sybil knew of its failure; she was made to know. For the first time in her life she saw Ensor as the spoiled and screaming child, and her first response was one of pity. The world had hurt her child, and she ran to comfort him.

He was screaming "Jealousy—jealousy."

"Of course, Dick, jealousy."

"The grudging swine! But I'll show them. I'll make them fawn and slobber."

She was astonished at his violence. She discovered occasions, and one of them was when he received a not very encouraging letter from his publishers, when he seemed to lose control of himself, and to go off into a raging and strutting fury.

"Read that. Impertinent beasts. Tradesmen! I'll show them something!"

"Of course, dear."

"I'll make the little snivelling people sit up. I'm going in with Gerrard; I'm putting all my capital into his show; I'll publish my own books."

He stood shaking a fist.

"You mark my words. I'll make people listen to me. There'll be a day when I'll have all the little jealous swine crawling."

His violence shocked her, for she was essentially gentle and sensitive. She asked for strength in a man, the quiet courage that can shut its

Conflict

mouth, and she was disturbed by angry chatterings and lack of self-control. But then Richard was a genius, and you had to make allowances for genius.

"Oh, my dear, of course they will listen to you."

He caught her almost roughly by the shoulders.

"Tell me, isn't 'Temptation' a great book?"

"A splendid book."

"A great book."

"Yes, a great book, Dick."

His eyes flared and she saw the red of the retina.

"If you did not think so—I'd kill you."

Shocked, amazed, frightened, compassionate, she clung to her mad egoist.

"My darling—don't! I—I believe in you; I shall always believe in you, even—"

He looked at her savagely, and with suspicion.

"Even! What, you are hedging; you think I can fail?"

"No—no."

When he had left her she found herself strangely exhausted, as though she had been walking in a gale. This violence! So sudden and unexpected! He had caught her emotion, her love, and twisted his angry fingers into it as though he had seized her by the hair. Oh, the next book must be a success; she could not bear another failure such as this. And yet, sitting relaxed on the sofa in the drawing-room of their little flat, she reminded herself that this was the first time that she had seen him thwarted. Would he always fly out like this, go white with rage, and storm about the room like a chattering and furious monkey in a cage? Oh, no, no! What was she thinking of? Such thoughts were horrible, disloyal!

But her feeling of serenity had gone, that sense of tender security which is so precious to a woman; and though her love for him was passionately protective, it knew a

qualm of fear. Her husband, her brilliant and audacious child, her little genius! She wept in secret over those wild and unmanly outbursts; they shook and frightened her even when she was busy with soothing hands and lips.

But surely, surely a man should not give way like this? It suggested littleness, a most disturbing and humiliating lack of fibre.

Was it mere outraged vanity? She tried to hide from herself her gradual realization of his overweening self-love.

In the spring Ensor, now a partner in the firm of Stephen Gerrard, published his second novel, but it had no better success than his first. The disappointment showed itself in him differently; he did not rage, but sulked, and talked about there being a conspiracy of silence. He stood upon his dignity.

"I shall not write another book. I don't throw my pearls before swine."

Sybil found his sulkings more trying than his rages. She knew moments of tender impatience when she wanted to say to him: "Oh, my dear, don't be so absurd. I thought you had a sense of humour. Men shouldn't fail like spoilt children." But his vanity was raw, and so sore and touchy that when she tried to put her woman's gentle common sense at his service, he turned upon her as though she was a traitress.

"What, you too! I suppose you think I'm a vain idiot?"

"Dick, I want you to go on. Other men have had disappointments. Think of how John was ploughed."

She saw his nostrils grow pinched. She had cut him more deeply than she knew.

"John? Thank you. You compare me with that dear old dullard. You don't understand, my dear."

"I do."

"Think so! It is my work that matters—my art. Do you imagine I am going to let it be humiliated, ignored?"

By Warwick Deeping

She took refuge in silence. For the first time in her life she doubted his sincerity.

Early in the summer John Backhouse saw Sybil Ensor for the first time since her marriage. Mrs. Arkwright had been vaguely ill for some months, and when the seriousness of her case at last declared itself, Sybil had to be told. And upon John Backhouse fell the duty of telling her that her mother's case was hopeless.

He was expected at Limes Lodge. Sybil was sitting in a chair by one of the french windows that opened upon an old lawn and a group of trees, and as she rose to meet him he was most swiftly aware of the change in her. She looked paler, thinner; there were the beginnings of a bothered and persistent frown on her forehead. But it was in her eyes that the change showed itself most markedly. Backhouse had always thought of her eyes as windows out of which a happy and serene soul looked, but now they had a clouded and watchful expression as though the spirit within had half drawn a curtain and looked from behind it a little fearfully.

Had Ensor been unkind to her? Or was she worried about her mother?

He held her hand for a moment.

"It is good to see you again, Sybil. I am afraid I have got to talk to you—"

He saw her eyelids flicker. She gave him the impression of wishing to appear to him as the same Sybil, and yet that she found herself unable to meet his eyes with the same complete frankness. She had things to conceal. "I am glad it is you, John. About mother. Please tell me."

She sat down again by the window and gazed at the trees while he stood beside and a little behind her chair, looking down at her with an observant tenderness that was more loyal than it had ever been. She was in trouble, she suffered, and was to suffer. He spoke very gently,

quietly, and his voice was like the touch of a deliberate and kind hand.

"I am afraid it is only a question of time. A growth; not very much to be done."

"Will she suffer?"

"Yes; but I shall see that she suffers as little as possible. You can leave that to me."

She put out a quick hand to him.

"John, I know you will. I'm so glad it's you. You—you comfort me."

VI

It was October, and Ensor, standing at the same window, saw the autumn trees spreading a tissue of gold upon the vivid grass. He had arrived in Oldbury less than half an hour ago, and in response to a telegram from Sybil, but as yet he had not seen his wife. She was with her mother, and he waited.

It annoyed him to be kept waiting, even when death was in the house. He was the lord of his wife's life; she should have come to him at once, hurrying down the stairs to receive his sympathy. He had been quite ready with his sympathy; but as he stood there looking at the autumn leaves, his fatal self-love interposed itself.

When she came to him he met her coldly.

"Where am I putting up? Here—? I can go to the Black Boar."

"They are getting a room ready for you, Dick."

Her thoughts were elsewhere, her consciousness a little dulled by sleeplessness and long hours of watching; she was a woman who took her human responsibilities to heart. Yet, he expected her to show her dependence upon him even when he was feeling piqued. She should have come to hang upon his sympathy with a cry of "Oh, Dick, I have wanted you; there is no one like you."

"You are tired," he said rather tensely.

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"Oh—tired—yes. But—then—what else—"

She seemed to him vague and strange. She sat down on the sofa and stared out of the window, and in her eyes there was something of expectancy. She seemed to be listening for some sound, without being aware of the fact that she was listening, and as though her waiting for someone or something had become so inevitable that she took it for granted. Ensor wondered. The impression did not please him.

Suddenly he saw her turn her head as though she had heard some familiar and welcome footstep. She rose from the sofa with an air of relief.

"I must go—"

His narrowing eyes watched her to the door.

"Not over yet?"

"No."

He had heard no sound that could explain her sudden air of going out to meet relief. A car had stopped outside the house, but Ensor had not noticed it. She closed the door after her. He heard voices in the hall.

"I'm so glad you have come."

"I should have been earlier. How is—it—now?"

"I'm praying that it can't be long."

"I know."

Ensor's rather goat-like head seemed to toss its horns. He was startled. He moved towards the door, hesitated, and stood still. He heard the two voices going up the stairs, linked together in intimate sympathy. His nostrils quivered.

He stood listening. His face seemed to grow very alert and pale. The cloud of disharmony upon his forehead deepened. When a pen was in his hand and the suggestive white page lay before him he would become the creature of creation, or rather a human mirror reflecting impressions, and as he stood there he became receptive. It was as though an impression was being forced upon him; it condensed upon

his more sensitive consciousness. Someone had come into the house, someone for whom the whole house had been waiting. His wife had been waiting for the coming of that presence; she had been drawn to it instantly.

John Backhouse, dull old John!

Ensor's face darkened.

John Backhouse, just a provincial doctor, a pedlar of pills! That quiet voice of his? It was the same and yet different. It had authority, sureness, a kind and soothing strength. And it aroused in Richard Ensor a sudden resentful jealousy. He had despised old John, triumphed over him, and yet that quiet voice seemed to pass through and over so useless a thing as scorn.

Ten minutes later he heard Backhouse coming down the stairs. He opened the door and waited for him in the hall.

"Well—what does the great man say?"

Backhouse picked up his hat and gloves. He spoke to Ensor over his shoulder.

"Mrs. Arkwright is dead."

It may be that Ensor was touched, for even your most gross egoist is human, and during the week that followed he was kinder to Sybil than he had been for many months. The strain on her had been heavy, and when the funeral was over she seemed to collapse. Ensor, full of new concern, and unable to efface his passion for display, became the charming, compelling husband. He fussed over her like a woman, but somehow she did not respond. It was as though some other solace had been withdrawn from her, and she missed it.

"Look here, old girl, you want a change."

Her apathy troubled him. He supposed it was the reaction.

"No—I shall be all right soon."

"There is nothing to keep you here now."

"All mother's affairs—and the furniture."

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By Warwick Deeping

"Leave it all to the lawyers."

"I think I should like to see John."

Ensor's eyes stared under bristling eyebrows.

"Old John! Why—he can only give you a tonic. I'll go round and see him."

"No—don't bother, Dick."

The possessive male in him was offended. He had thought to smother those qualms of incipient jealousy by proving to himself that he was as sensitive and understanding a mate as a woman could desire. Surely his caresses were like no other man's? And she had not responded, or rather—her response had surprised him. He was conscious of feeling shocked, hurt, misunderstood.

"Of course—if you think old John can do you any good—we'll send for him."

But Backhouse was not sent for.

Ensor showed signs of restlessness. He hinted that it was time for him to be back at work. Oldbury bored him. His brilliant reputation had suffered a slight dimming. Moreover, at the back of his mind was the knowledge that Mrs. Arkwright had left a considerable sum behind her, and that the money must be Sybil's. He needed a part of this money; his ambition had laid a possessive hand upon it; he wanted a bigger share and more scope for himself in Gerrard's business; Gerrard was one of those cool and cynical fellows with a flat white face and an eyeglass and a business man's respect for money.

He threw out hints to Sybil.

"What about your mother's affairs, dear? Would you like me to take them in hand for you?"

She had shown herself disinclined to discuss the contents of her mother's will.

"Oh, presently, Dick. Mr. Mellows has the will."

"But, my dear girl, surely I am supposed to know——"

"Of course."

"I am going up to town on Mon-

day. I ought to be back at work. But if you care to stay on here for a few days——"

"Yes—I think I shall. There is so much to be done. Shall I ask Mr. Mellows to send you a copy of the will?"

He stood upon his dignity.

"Surely—as your husband—I have some interest in your affairs."

Ensor returned to their flat in Oakleigh Gardens, and on the Wednesday he received a large buff envelope from the firm of Mellows and Mellows of Oldbury. It contained a copy of Mrs. Arkwright's will. She had left everything to her daughter, but it was left on trust, and the trust was to be continued for the benefit of Sybil's children, should there be children. The two trustees were old Mellows and John Backhouse.

Ensor was furious.

VII

In the spring of the following year old Tom Backhouse died.

On the day of the funeral, John, returning from visiting such patients as had to be visited, and getting out of his car and passing the familiar window where the old man had loved to sit, saw a woman's face behind the closed sash. She had pulled aside one of the drawn curtains and was looking out at the green hills beyond the river.

Backhouse was conscious of feeling shocked.

"Sybil——"

She may have heard him utter her name, or she may have become suddenly aware of his presence, for he saw her smile faintly. Her lips moved—"John."

He went in. She had let the curtain fall, but was still standing by the window. He had been struck by her paleness, and in the half-light her face had a shadowy pallor.

"I wanted to come, John."

"How good of you."

He had thought her looking ill.

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Certainly her face was thinner and her eyes very big and dark in it. They expressed a veiled anxiousness, and he had come to recognize that particular look in the eyes of certain sensitive people. Also her thinness suggested wasting, an almost transparent fineness, a thinning of the texture of the flesh so that the self's light from within shone through it.

He held her hand.

"Good of you to come. He had a very quiet ending—like his life, quiet and good."

His eyes were searching hers, and under that kind gaze hers fell.

"Are you all right, Sybil?"

"Quite."

"It struck me—"

He saw her vaguely confused and wishing to veil it. She made her eyes meet his.

"I don't think London suits me as well as Oldbury."

"No worries?"

"No."

He respected her reticence. He was her trustee, but his trusteeship covered only her financial affairs, and what she did not choose to tell him could not be told. He had good cause to doubt the happiness of this marriage, and his suspicions hurt him because there was no jealous satisfaction for him in standing by and seeing Sybil hurt. It seemed to him that she was the one woman to whom such a thing ought not to happen.

"How's Dick?"

She made a very brave reply.

"Oh, very busy."

"Writing?"

"Writing and speaking."

"What—politics?"

"In a way."

"I did not know he was a political animal. I'm afraid I'm not. I'm a bad citizen."

She gave him a queer, soft glance.

"Oh, no, you must not say that. People who heal—"

"I try to."

"It is the—will to things—that matters."

She drove in the same carriage with him and stood by one of the old yew trees on the chalky upland that was the resting place of Oldbury's dead. She had a veiled white look, a suffering calmness, as though she herself had laid dead illusions under the earth. Afterwards she would not stay; a mood of haste seemed to take possession of her.

"No; I must catch the four o'clock train, John. I am Dick's secretary. But I wanted to come down—for this."

He looked at her searchingly and did not attempt to persuade her to stay longer. That was what she found so good in him; he was not a man who argued or asked fool questions; he seemed to understand her as he understood a patient.

"I'll drive you to the station."

Her silence was grateful. When near him she had a rare feeling of security, of being all smoothed out, and reinforced with a new courage.

"Thank you—John."

"Don't let Dick work you too hard. Do you get out enough?"

"Oh—yes. The parks—you know."

"Sunlight—yes."

But she left him feeling greatly disturbed. She had held his hand for a moment and then had quickly closed the window and gone to the other end of the carriage and sat down in a corner with her face averted. Backhouse stood looking after the tail of the train. What was she going back to? Unhappiness, exploitation, an ill-tempered pup with a sore head, a man swollen with self-love, a disappointed egoist?

Someone spoke to him. He found a worried little woman at his elbow.

"Oh—doctor—they said I'd catch you at the station— My man's that bad—"

Backhouse came back to his kind smile.

"My car's here, Mrs. Brown. I'll drive you down with me."

With the evening rush of London about her, Sybil Ensor felt herself back once more in a world of con-

By Warwick Deeping

fused disharmonies, a creature of haste, hurrying homewards to make good the day's deception. She took a taxi from Waterloo. She had planned to be back at Oakleigh Gardens before Dick returned from Gerrards. But how humiliating was this haste, to save herself from a man's bad temper! She did not wish him to know that she had been to Oldbury, and her reasons for not wishing him to know were innocently magnanimous even in their deception. Caught in a traffic block at the end of York Road, she glanced at her wrist watch and tried not to feel agitated. It was absurd—this agitation, this trembling before a man's moodinesses, his irritable tyrannies, his questions, his habit of twisting life into bitter knots. When the taxi moved on she looked out vaguely over the river and wondered why she had cared and why she still cared, for care she did. She was involved in the pathos of her husband's vein fumings. He was her spoilt child. She had given him patience, gentleness, sympathy, and the more she gave the more he took. His evil humours exhausted her.

The taxi made good speed down Victoria Street. She glanced again at her watch. It was ten minutes to six, and Ensor was not due back before six. She would have time to change her black frock.

The lift took her to the fourth floor.

"Have you seen Mr. Ensor?"

No, the porter had not seen him. She let herself into the narrow hall, and was going straight to the bedroom when she heard Ensor's voice calling to her from the room that was used as a dining-room and study.

"Hallo! That you?"

She trembled, and felt ashamed of her trembling. Was she not an intelligent woman of eight-and-twenty with a private income of five hundred a year? She could call herself a woman of the world, and yet she trembled. She hesitated; she

opened the door and saw Ensor sitting at the writing-table in the window with a sky of little flocculent white clouds beyond him.

He turned in his chair and looked at her.

"Hallo. You have been down there—have you?"

His cocked head showed a puckered forehead and ironical eyes. Often he was abrupt with her to the point of rudeness, and she—a thing of sensitive dignity—was hurt and distressed by it. Inwardly he made her feel a dishevelled, breathless creature.

"Where—Dick—?"

"Think I can't distinguish the funeral touch! Wasn't much to do at the 'house.' Came back for tea, and caught you."

She reddened.

"Dick,—you can be loathsome."

It was her first outburst. He laughed, but his eyes were cruel.

"Loathsome! That's a fine word. So you scuttled off to see old John—"

"I went to see an old friend buried."

"Did you, my dear! I've got some stuff for you to type. You can get it done before dinner."

VIII

AFTERWARDS her pride would not let her go to Oldbury, and for more than a year she and Backhouse did not meet. They exchanged occasional letters, and in her letters he could detect a note of regret. She spoke of Oldbury as "that gentle old town in a green valley." She recalled the view across the river, the beech trees, and the old thorns that whitened the hillside in the spring. Her letters were those of a woman who looked backwards because the future was like the sky of an English winter, overcast and gloomy.

"I always feel," she wrote, "that you and Oldbury never change."

But Oldbury was changing,

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though Backhouse did not tell her so, and he—like other Englishmen—was watching the change in English Oldbury with doubt and a deep disquietude. It seemed to him that Oldbury was England in miniature, and that what was happening here was happening everywhere. Faith was dead, and over its grave the disillusionment of the great war had scattered ashes. Oldbury was growing restless. Farrow's Flats and all those ugly shanties built during the war teemed with strange people. The old town had made munitions, and after the war it made motor-cars. A little Yorkshireman with a head of brass had set up a new factory and dreamed hard dreams of mass production. He had made money. A year ago his enterprise had begun to crawl up the green valley, and old Tom Backhouse's favourite window gazed now upon new brick and corrugated iron and cindery spaces, a great ugly gash in the English landscape. Old trees had fallen.

But it was the new people who were strange to Backhouse, who was a southerner, and in outlook more like some big downland shepherd. Industrialism had arrived, the industrialism of the munitioneer and the motor mechanic, and when Backhouse went into new Oldbury he felt that he was among strange and alien people whose souls he did not understand. With their restlessness, and their thin and sallow faces, and their mistrustful eyes they made him conscious of being regarded as an enemy. New Oldbury struck him as sinister; it had a stunted arrogance, something that leered and grudged and threatened.

Late on one November afternoon, just as dusk was falling, Backhouse was at Oldbury station when a crowd of men came storming along the covered way and down the stairs to the up-platform. The men were factory hands who, unable to find lodgings in Oldbury, came to and fro by train from Reedham. They were a rough crowd; they shouted

and whistled. Backhouse became involved in their rush for the up-platform and stood aside to let them pass. A swarthy, drab crowd it was, strangely sinister. One sallow fellow came down the covered way shouting—"What colour—what colour!"

He stared Backhouse in the face with a smiling insolence.

"What colour?"

Backhouse smiled back at him.

A down train had arrived, and its crowd of emerging passengers met the factory crowd in the covered way. The men of the new age ploughed through, and Backhouse, pausing to watch, saw a woman jostled and pushed against the wall. The thing both surprised and angered him because of its charging, rude wantonness. Englishmen did not push women out of the way. And then his surprise increased and grew hotly personal. He went to meet the woman.

"Sybil—"

She looked ill. Her eyes were both afraid and glad.

"John—"

He waited, putting himself beside her, his bigness between her and the crowd.

"What are you doing here? Staying—?"

"I have come down for an hour. It was to see—you."

She seemed to flinch from the noisy crowd, and he took her arm.

"My car's outside. We'll get out of this."

"But what is it? A football match?"

"No—just some of the factory hands in a hurry to get home. This is a new Oldbury."

She seemed to shiver.

"This—! But I have always thought that Oldbury could not be like this. There is something frightening, John, about these new crowds."

He kept close to her, his big shoulders making her look frail and slim.

"Yes—they are not beautiful.

By Warwick Deeping

Perhaps one can't blame them. We are all of us in such a beastly, greedy hurry. Have you had tea?"

"No."

"Then you shall have tea. Dick all right?"

"He is well."

"Ah!" thought Backhouse, "well and not well. Why—to God—did she marry him!"

He put her into his car, wrapped a rug round her, and drove up to Lombard Street. Blue gloom hung over the valley, and in the dusk she could not see the changed face of the hillside. There had been silence between them, and with the same silent kindness he helped her out and took her into the old long room where a fire was blazing.

"Mary, tea for two. And I shall be engaged for an hour. People must wait."

He came back and stood over her as she sat by the fire, holding out her hands to it. His eyes were very gentle and compassionate.

"Well—my dear—will you talk now or during tea? What can I do?"

She gazed at the fire.

"I came down to see if you could help me, John."

She told him her trouble. It appeared that the publishing firm of Gerrard and Ensor was in difficulties; she was assured that these difficulties were only temporary; but they wanted ready money.

"Dick wants me to help. But then—my capital—as you know, John."

He nodded a grave head.

"I do know. I think your mother was rather a wise woman."

"Then—the trustees could not arrange——"

"No, my dear, no. Ensor must get his money elsewhere. I am not going to have your money played with."

Though he had refused to listen to the suggestion he felt that his refusal gave her a sense of relief.

"Dick never forgave my mother."

"I dare say not. Nor me. He will be angry."

"Oh, yes. He is always angry. Oh!—but I ought not to say that! And yet I feel that I can tell you things, John."

"Always."

He looked at her intently.

"Is he unkind to you, Sybil?"

She did not answer the question, but her silence was a sufficient answer.

"How serious is this affair?"

"Rather serious, I'm afraid—though he won't admit it."

"How much do they need?"

"Two thousand pounds. To pacify one or two creditors. They hope to do well with two or three new books."

"Would five hundred be any use? I'd lend you five hundred, Sybil. I'm afraid I can't manage more."

She turned quickly in her chair.

"John, you are—a good man. But I could not take your money, dear. But I do thank you. I do feel how generous——"

"Fudge!" he said, and held the hand she put out to him. "Let Dick have it—for your sake. It's you I am thinking of."

"No—I could not take it, John."

"Well, tell Ensor you know where to lay your hands on five hundred, if it is any use——"

She stood up and put up her face to his, and very gently he kissed her forehead.

When she returned to the flat in Oakleigh Gardens she found an irritable and worried man waiting for her.

"Well—any luck?"

She did not look at Ensor, for his face was not pleasant to look at these days.

"No. John won't hear of the trust money being touched."

"Curse him."

"That's not fair, Dick. He offered to lend us five hundred pounds of his own money."

Perhaps she knew that the thing would anger him, and perhaps she did not care. He was killing her right to care.

"Curse him! Do you think I

Conflict

would take that old fool's money? It's an insult——"

"To me?"

"To you! Oh—can't you see? You have given him a chance to humiliate me, and he snapped at it. I'll write and tell him to go to hell."

With an air of weariness she turned to go to her room.

"John does not snap at smaller dogs. I should not write that letter, Richard."

She closed the door on an angry and evil face.

IX

SOME six months later the publishing firm of Gerrard and Ensor called its creditors together, and the son of Red Ensor ceased to exist as a man of private property. He had lost every penny in the smash and also the remnants of a gentleman's philosophy.

Oldbury's brilliant young man lived for six months on his wife's income, a snarling, captious, bitter creature who seemed to find a strange pleasure in making a woman suffer because he suffered. Sybil had ceased to find him pathetic. No longer could she look on him as the hurt child, an impassioned if peevish boy. His overweening vanity, caught in the trap of failure, showed its cruel teeth. He became mean, incredibly and savagely mean. It was as though his sore self-love found relief in hurting her.

The voice of his vanity grew more shrill and resentful. He would stand on the hearthrug and declaim.

"They—shall—listen to me. The fat beasts! They wouldn't buy our books. I'm not done with yet. I'll get my own back. This world of stockbrokers and grocers!"

He was too vivid and real a figure to her to be ridiculous. In fact he began to assume an air of mystery, of rather sinister forcefulness. His appearance changed.

The sleek, nice, comely Mercury in him vanished; he seemed to become all angles and bristles; his head grew more goat-like; his shoulders jutted out; his long hands seemed to clench themselves or to point accusing and furious fingers. His mouth became strange and angular and hard; his very eyebrows bristled; he moved with an embittered, slouching sullenness that had some purpose. He laughed a good deal, showing his teeth, and his laughter was unpleasant, suggesting that he was enjoying some secret and bitter jest.

His exacting and evil humours exhausted her. She felt that life and all the beauty and seemliness and grace of it were fading away. He began to be out a great deal, especially at nights; his work for the moment was a sporadic form of journalism, but he never let her see anything that he wrote.

Later, he began to bring men to the flat. They did not seem to belong to any class that Sybil had met, and she disliked them without quite knowing why she disliked them. They made her think of black birds of prey, creatures with harsh voices, throwers of vitriol. One of them was a Russian with oiled black hair and a great white pallid face, who smiled and smiled.

They spoke a language that was strange to her. It was both mysterious and violent and cynical.

She appealed to Ensor.

"Please don't bring those men here. Who are they?"

He looked down at her with an air of ironical malice.

"You don't like them."

"I don't."

"No—you would not like my friends. You are a snob, my dear."

She shrugged wearily. He was growing impossible, and more and more her thoughts went to Oldbury and that other man—the healer—quietly busy with the work of the world, and loving it. How men differed. She saw these two in vivid contrast, the one as the healer

By Warwick Deeping

—the builder; the other as the violent and destructive child, embodying all that was worst in the day's temper. It was as though Ensor had caught the disease of the moment, and it was showing in him a delirium of envy and ambition, cupidity and restlessness. Being a woman, her hands reached out to man—the protector and the healer. Her loyalty was dead. She was suffering martyrdom.

Then came a day when she could bear it no longer. She packed a trunk, left a letter and key, and fled.

That same evening John Backhouse, returning from a long day's work, found her sitting at his father's window, a shadow of herself, worn, very weary.

"I have had to give it up, John. I could not bear it any longer."

She looked into his loyal eyes, and seeing all that was waiting for her there, she broke down and wept.

"Oh—I have tried! I want peace—John, peace, the right to be myself in some quiet place. I'm all torn and dishevelled—"

He drew the curtains across the window, and kneeling down, held her head against his shoulder.

"My dear—you shall have it. I have felt this coming. Always—somehow—I have had a feeling that it had to come."

"I was so blind."

He stroked her hair.

"No—too kind, my dear, too generous. You were right to come to me."

He took Sybil Ensor's affairs into his big hands. She had taken rooms at the Black Boar, and there she was to stay for a night. Backhouse knew of comfortable lodgings in Nelson Terrace, in a little old Georgian house overlooking Oldbury Park; she would be more secure there than at an inn. For Ensor had to be remembered. Her reasonable expectation was that he would fly down to Oldbury in a rage.

"Leave Ensor to me. And you must see Mellows. You must be protected."

"It is peace I crave for, John."

"Of course."

"I should like a little house here—if there is one to be had. It would make things feel more permanent."

"Park Lodge is to let. Remember it?"

"The very place. I'd love it. Just greenness, and old trees, and cows feeding. I feel that I could sit and look at such tranquil things for ever and ever."

"I'll go straight to Nelson Terrace and the agents. You are going to have dinner with me before you go back to the Boar."

"May I, John?"

"May you!"

He patted her shoulder and went out.

His one thought was to protect her against Ensor. He turned in at the Boar, and had a few words with the proprietor, who was a good sort of fellow. "If Mr. Richard Ensor should come here to-night, kick him out. Have no room vacant. I'll book every vacant room, if necessary." The proprietor understood; he was English. "All right, doctor; you leave it to me." Backhouse went on to see old Mellows, and from the lawyer's he rang up the local estate agent, catching him just before closing time. Park Lodge was still to let. Backhouse secured it. The woman who let rooms in Nelson Terrace was a patient of his, and a somewhat devoted patient. He had no trouble there.

He returned to Lombard Street wondering whether all these preparations would be nullified by some feminine impulse.

"I have arranged everything, Sybil."

"Thank you, John."

She was very calm. She gave him her hand, and her eyes were steadfast.

"I shall not change my mind. I have borne too much."

After dinner, when Backhouse had taken her to the Black Boar and

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was approaching his own door, he saw a man there with his hand on the bell. It was Ensor. He turned to face his cousin.

"I have come for my wife."

Backhouse looked at him grimly.

"Why come here?"

"She's in Oldbury. I'm not going to stand any nonsense."

His teeth showed between tense lips.

"You had better go back to town, Ensor. If your wife has left you—she has left you for good. She is not in this house. I—too—stand no nonsense."

"Liar."

"Don't be a fool as well as a cad. You have driven the best woman of the world out of your life. Go back to town."

"When I go she'll go back with me."

"She won't."

Ensor raised a fist.

"You think you have got her, do you?"

"Man—don't be such a cad. And I warn you—keep away."

Ensor's fist fell.

"You go to hell. I'll find her. We'll see."

X

He did find her, but not that night, and when he found her the way to her was barred. Backhouse's chauffeur, a man of muscle and great good temper, was behind the door of No. 10 Nelson Terrace, and Ensor got no farther.

"Mrs. Ensor's here. I'm her husband."

"Mrs. Ensor is seeing no one, sir."

"Look here—you—whichever you are—stand out of the way."

"Sorry, sir, but you can't come in."

"I'm coming in."

"Sorry, sir, but you're not."

With gentle emphasis the man closed the door in Ensor's face, and Ensor went away to see old Mellows, and saw young Mellows, who was more formidable than his father.

Egotistical fireworks were superfluous. Ensor was told very politely to get out.

"You shall hear from me through my lawyers."

"Delighted," said big Mellows; "I assure you we should prefer it."

Backhouse, shrewd judge of human affairs, supposed that Oldbury would be free of Ensor for a while, for Ensor would be short of ready money, and Oldbury was not the adoring town it had used to be. Young Mellows, following up an obvious attack, went up to London next day, saw the agents who controlled the Oakleigh flats, and arranged for the sub-letting of Mrs. Ensor's flat. He also arranged with a firm of furniture removers for the immediate removal of her furniture to Park Lodge at Oldbury.

At the flat he fell in with Ensor, and the battle was rejoined.

"I should like you to remove your personal belongings, Mr. Ensor. Your wife's furniture is to be packed off immediately."

Ensor was sullen.

"Kicking me out—are you? Oh—very well."

"Nothing belonging to Mrs. Ensor must be touched. I have an inventory."

"Generous people."

There was an interlude, and Ensor's self-effacement lasted for a month. He neither wrote to Sybil nor tried to see her, but to Sybil's friends this silence was not final. Ensor had a sense of the dramatic, and Backhouse could remember how as a boy the charming Mercury had set the stage and prepared his effect. A man who had never pitied anyone, he would be the very creature to play upon a woman's pity, to appear suddenly in that little house of hers and shatter her feeling of tranquillity. Sybil had moved into Park Lodge; she had two good maids; she asked for nothing but to live there very quietly, and sit with folded wings, resting. She looked out upon a green and pleasant world; it flowed to the very windows

By Warwick Deeping

of her little house, almost encompassing it. She had a walled and secret little garden.

John Backhouse saw a change in her. She looked rested; an air of sleekness returned; but her eyes still had an expression of watchfulness. She knew that her season of storms was not over.

"He will come here some day. It is inevitable."

"Do you wish to see him?"

"No. He has a way of rending me to pieces. But it would not be in the old way, John."

"You do not care as you did?"

"I do not care—now. But it is so peaceful here."

"Don't see him. Tell your maids."

"I have told them. But when a man means to see a particular person—"

"I know. But you know what to do, Sybil. Ring me up, and ring up Mellows. One of us would soon be here to close the interview. Promise."

"There is no need for me to promise, John. I'm afraid I should cry out to my friends. It will happen. I am almost eager to get it over."

She knew her Ensor. She could foresee him coming to her with his sensuous mouth all soft and appealing, full of reminiscent tendernesses, thinking to overwhelm her with protests of remorse, to catch at her compassion. It had happened so before, but she had forgiven too often. She knew the familiar cry—"Sybil—I'm a wild-tempered rascal, but I want you; I can't get on without you." She had let herself be melted, but now she was so cold towards her egoist that she could refuse to melt. This silence of his was preparatory, a nice pause before an emotional leap. She was right.

She happened to see him push open the white gate of the garden on that summer evening. One of her maids was out, and the door was unlocked. Also, there were the open windows. She ran to the telephone

which was in her bedroom. She had been put through to Lombard Street when she heard voices below.

"Is Dr. John in?"

"He is in the surgery. Who's that speaking?"

"Mrs. Ensor of Park Lodge. Will you ask him to come round at once? He will understand."

"Yes—madam."

She hung up the receiver and heard the protesting voice of the maid.

"Mrs. Ensor is not in, sir."

"Oh, yes, she is. I shall go upstairs and find her, unless you tell her that Mr. Ensor is here."

Sybil went to the head of the stairs.

"Is that Mr. Ensor, Kate?"

"Yes, madam."

"Will you show him into the drawing-room and tell him that I am coming down."

She knew that her crisis had come, and she was conscious of a sense of relief. She wished to get it over; she was determined that he should be made to realize that she would not live with him again. He was standing by the window when she entered the room.

"This is my house—Richard."

He made a sudden and impulsive movement towards her, holding out his hands.

"Sybil—wife—I want you."

Yes, he had used the very same emotional sentence in his books; she remembered it very well; he had used it before to her. She remained by the door, holding it open.

"Please go. I find life very peaceful here. Must you try to disturb it?"

"I have a right—"

"No. I will not let you disturb it. You do not want me; you have never wanted me in the real way. Yes, this is final."

His face put off the softness of its appeal.

"Oh—you have been got at. They have poisoned you against me—"

"It was you who were poisoning my life, Richard."

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"And old John is the antidote—what!"

Baulked, he relapsed into one of his sneering rages, and very calmly, but with a purposeful swiftness, she closed the door on him, turning the key in the lock. She heard his fists on the door. An alarmed maid was waiting at the foot of the stairs, and Sybil took the girl with her to her own room. She locked the door and sat down at the window overlooking the little front garden and the park. In the room below Ensor was behaving like the gentleman in "Iris"; his wife could hear chairs crashing and the breaking of glass and china.

She saw Backhouse's car draw up outside the white gate. He had his chauffeur with him. She rose and spoke to Backhouse from the upper window.

"I am sorry, John. It has happened."

She closed the window, and sat rigid with folded hands while John Backhouse dealt with her impossible mate. She did not wish to see what happened, nor to hear what was said. She had supreme faith in the man who had loved her all these years, and knew that those quiet and strong hands of his would disentangle the knot for her. Vividly she recalled that memory of the Old-bury beech woods by the river—but now her sympathies had changed sides.

But she could not help hearing Ensor's shoutings. Backhouse had him by the collar, with the chauffeur standing by and realizing that Dr. John could handle his mad dog without assistance. Ensor was screaming like an hysterical woman.

"All right—I'll have you two watched. If my wife's a——"

Backhouse's hand twisted itself into Ensor's collar.

"Be quiet——"

"That's right, try to choke me—you great cad. But you won't shut my mouth. I'll let the whole place know. Respectable John, the noble doctor! They'll hound you out——"

Backhouse managed to silence him.

"Open that door, Smith, will you?"

"The garden door, sir?"

"Yes—I am taking Mr. Ensor out by the back way."

Smith opened the door and remained tactfully on the outer edge of the final process. But if ever a man had a thrashing Ensor had one; he was up against an anger that was greater than his own. It cowed him; he became what he was—the coward; he lay on the grass and whimpered.

Backhouse stood over him.

"Get up. And don't come here again. And if you utter one lie about her——"

Ensor was mute. He went out through the door in the high brick wall, and that was the last that Backhouse was to see of him for the space of two years.

He re-entered the house and met Ensor's wife at the foot of the stairs.

"I'm sorry, Sybil; but I don't think he will bother you again."

"Thank you, John," was all she said.

XI

For the first time for some years Sybil Ensor knew peace. She could sit at her window and watch the green of the trees turning to gold, the great chestnuts towering in yellow magnificence, the beeches all aflame. The slopes of the park grew flecked with fallen leaves.

She knew peace in a world that was sick for lack of the peace it could not find. Even this quiet old town was full of the new disharmonies, but to Sybil they were not very apparent; she was living in the consciousness of a wise and magnanimous devotion, and in a world of books and quiet thinking and happy feeling.

Once a week John Backhouse came to see her, and she understood the inspiration of his self-restraint.

By Warwick Deeping

One hour in a whole week, and yet it did not seem to matter. It was their awareness of the great thing that mattered. It gave to the lives of both a beautiful sense of reality, of faith and tranquillity. They loved, and yet neither had ever spoken words of love. Once a week their hands touched twice, in his coming and his going. He loved her as he loved his work; she knew it; she was content.

Not that either of them feared what the world might say. His wish was that the world should have no shadow of an excuse, nor had it.

"Some things, Sybil, are too sacred."

She understood.

"I am happy. But my one desire—is for someone else's happiness."

"I never was so happy. Life's good; my work's good. I'm lucky."

Her eyes had lost all their fear.

"Dear man,—you make me feel healed. Thank God for someone who is not greedy."

Always she felt him near her, the healer in his old English town, going quietly about his work, so much part of the place's life that Oldbury looked on him much as it looked upon its High Street or its town hall or its great grey church. He belonged to them. He was just Dr. John, and sometimes Young Backhouse. He was one of the town's most human institutions.

Of Richard Ensor Oldbury had ceased to talk, for he had sunk below the town's horizon. It would seem that he was one of those brilliant stars that lose themselves in the smoke of the great city. But once every quarter John Backhouse received a letter from Sybil's husband.

"DEAR HONEST JOHN,—Keep your feet out of my slippers. I am having them watched.

"ENSOR."

That was the pith and the purpose of each letter. They came without an address, like stones flung from a dark thicket by a malicious hand. Their gibes varied a little. "A pro-

fessional man's honour should be unassailable, my dear John." Backhouse burnt these letters.

He wondered whether Sybil was the recipient of like messages.

"Do you ever hear?"

Yes, she received letters, but she had concealed the fact from him.

"Now and again—John. I burn them."

"Don't let them worry you."

In his mind always was the question of her freedom. There were certain shynesses in Backhouse that he had carried over from his boyhood's days, and he could not bring himself to speak to her of a reasonable retaliation. If Ensor threatened, they were more than justified in having Ensor watched, and yet he could not say to her—"Shall we spy upon the fellow?" The choice was hers. His large and sensitive nature did not choose to persuade her towards the back streets of the legal process. That was old Mellows' prerogative. As her silent lover he would not interfere.

In this—too—she understood him. He could be generous. His devotion had a fine delicacy, and when old Mellows took up the question with her with a brisk and paternal matter of factness, she was very frank with him. She showed the old lawyer one of Ensor's letters.

"I wish nothing done."

Old Mellows, tapping the letter with his pince-nez, was equally frank with her.

"This is what I call moral blackmail. If I may say so—my dear lady, Backhouse stands so firmly here—"

"I know," she said; "but it's the very uniqueness of his dear pedestal that makes me love it the more carefully. I would rather have it so."

"But then—your two futures—my dear— You have claims, both of you, on the future."

But he could not persuade her towards action.

"To me—John's life here—is rather beautiful. There is so little beauty in life— Look at it with

Conflict

my eyes, Mr. Mellows. I have suffered."

Old Mellows too had his traditions.

"Without fear or reproach. Yes, my dear, I understand. I shall not open the question with you again unless you express a wish."

So the months slipped by, and the Ensor star seemed lost in the smoke of the great city, and in all the obscure unrest of a disgruntled age. And then suddenly it blazed as a little red splash upon a printed page. Backhouse saw it by chance, and he saw it before Ensor's wife had any knowledge of the thing. The news was contained in a little, bald paragraph tucked away in a corner of Backhouse's morning paper. "Communist sentenced." Somewhere in the grim and disillusioned grime of a northern city Ensor had found a tub, and been pulled off it by the police for blasphemy, and also for inciting the police to turn their truncheons on the capitalists. "They fooled you with God. Their God's rotting like an old scarecrow. You—the worker—are God. This is your heaven. Take the gold, my lads."

Backhouse felt shocked as a quiet man is shocked by a screaming voice and vulgar extravagance. Ensor had been sent to cool his head and tongue in jail for two months, though a public whipping in the face of the crowd would have been far more apposite. But to Backhouse it seemed an abominable thing that a man of Ensor's heritage and schooling should snatch at notoriety because true fame had been denied him, and attain to this notoriety by spitting venom at some poor, disillusioned, ignorant crowd.

He showed the paper to old Mellows.

"How does that strike you?"

"What! Our local genius turned demagogue!"

"Do you think she ought to know?"

"What good would it do?"

"Yes—what good!"

But their silence was to prove superfluous. This was the first rising of Ensor's star. He had been pilloried, made a martyr of by the respectable world, and his star became more like a comet with a red and angry tail. It was an extraordinary transfiguration, the inflamed egoist discovering his heaven in helping a distressed world towards an unsocial hell. His goat's head with its cocky tilt and restless eyes began to shine in the glare of the crowd's discontent. He flashed into print, but not as a poet. He was a platform hero, an apostle of liberty, crowned with the crowd's yells. Richard Ensor! The name became unpleasantly familiar. He had found his voice and people who would listen to his voice, the poisoned voice of a furious and embittered vanity.

XII

SYBIL stood at the open window, and the night was full of stars. She had the park before her, with the bosky shadowiness of its great trees, and all the silence of its starlit spaces.

"How peaceful—how different!" she thought, and heard the gate open. He had come to hear what she had to tell him, though the hour was close on midnight.

"John."

He limped across the grass to the window.

"You are back."

"Yes."

He stood, looking up and in at her dim face. For a moment she was silent; she rested her hands on the window-sill; she seemed to draw in the deep, sweet night air as though the breathing of it cooled and cleansed her thoughts.

"I heard him speak."

"The great meeting?"

"Yes, it was horrible, wonderful and horrible."

"He can speak."

"It was not like speaking, John. Devilish! Oh, he is clever, with

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the cleverness of a madman. It was like a human figure spouting some horrible, flaming liquid. I could not bear much of it. I came away."

"You should not have gone, dear. And the people, what effect?"

He felt her shiver.

"That was the most horrible part of it, John. It was as though he had the power to make them drunk. They ceased to be men and women and became wild beasts. And such an appeal! An appeal to all that is evil in us, envy and hatred and lust and greed. I want to forget."

"Forget. There is peace here. There is dew on the grass. Forget it—my dear."

"I feel that I cannot forget it. All those furious faces turned up to—his face! Oh!—John, such a man would be better dead. He is a poisoner. He is one of those who rub acid into the world's wounds."

Backhouse was silent.

"Some day we shall be healed," he said presently.

Slowly, and with a movement of the eternal woman stooping over life—the child—she bent down to him.

"You have always been a healer, John. We women ask that of men. And yet I married him! How strange!"

XIII

So Richard Ensor made the world listen to him, and dabbled his vain white hands in the world's emotions. He was one of the figures of the hour, a man who made other men drunk with words, for he could assume a reformer's frenzy, and dress up his red lusts in the white garments of an ideal. He was sincere only in one thing, in his hatred of that respectable world that had refused to accept him as a genius. He was getting level with that world. He was ready to hold a knife at its throat.

But if he hated his "stockbrokers and grocers" he despised the poor lads who listened to him and

shouted him up to the skies. They called him "Red Ensor,"—"Revolution Dick," but in those studiously grubby rooms where he and his cronies met, these crazy ideals were no more than cock-shies or empty bottles to be tossed into a corner. The real Ensor laughed them to scorn. The common man was a dupe; the crowd, cattle with blazing faggots tied to their horns.

Yet these ironical and malicious eyes of his were still turned towards Oldbury. It was as though this ancient town symbolized the class that he hated, the smug people who had withheld from him his success. John Backhouse symbolized it. And Ensor's vanity was like a crowing cock on a dunghill, and of all the places in the world, he desired Oldbury as his own particular crowing-post. He would show these people!

XIV

His chance was to come.

There was trouble stirring in Farrow's Flats, and in the brand new factory of the brass-headed Yorkshireman whose methods of mass production had produced other forms of energy. At the bottom of it—to begin with—lay nothing but the all-prevailing unrest. One man was making much money; other men were not making as much as they wished to make. One man was a brass-headed autocrat; the other men were obstinate and imagining themselves exploited. Backhouse—the plain doctor—who knew both sides, and entered the homes of each, could understand that both were right and both were wrong. It was one of those quarrels in which obstinate and discontented men involve themselves until the quarrel becomes the reality, and the aims and ideals mere superfluities. Unwise heat was blown upon by unwise lungs. Both sides arrived at that state of mulishness when nothing remains but an inevitable clashing of thick skulls. Employer and employed were out for a row.

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Someone was victimized, or was said to have been victimized. Officials intervened. Men talked of downing tools. There were angry harangues.

The brass-headed Yorkshireman figuratively banged a fist on a table. He looked out his men.

When tempers were at their hottest Red Ensor appeared in the town. He wore an old black suit, a large soft black hat with a flat brim, a red tie, and hair that was flamboyantly long. One of the first persons to see him was John Backhouse, and that because he called on Backhouse in Lombard Street, and with an ironical glint in his black eyes, asked Backhouse to prescribe for him.

"My throat's a bit relaxed. All this talking."

Backhouse looked at him with quiet gravity.

"What are you doing down here?"

"Here on business, John."

"This lock-out?"

"You have said it."

Almost Backhouse could hear him crowing.

"Much better leave us to settle our own troubles."

"Think so!"

"I know both sides. The men are a very decent crowd, and old Hallam may be a bit of a curmudgeon, but he is not a bad sort. But I suppose it is not much use my suggesting—"

"Not a bit—I have come here to crow, and crow I shall. We'll show your people something—"

Backhouse opened the door.

"No; sorry. To me—you are nothing but a mad dog, Ensor, and a bad one."

"Of course. But my soap-box, Backhouse, is a bit more significant than your private pulpit."

He gave Backhouse a twisted and mocking glance as he went out.

"I've more guts than you thought I had, old John. How's Sybil?"

Backhouse closed the door on him. But this poisoner of plain men's

minds, this flaunting egoist, this whipper-up of evil passions, was to be the instigator of happenings that were strange and new to this old town. As Sybil had said, he had the fatal power to make young men and lads drunk with words. There was a scuffle on the second night of his sojourn in Oldbury. Old Hallam's windows were broken. His daughter, driving down Mill Lane in her car, was pulled out of it by a mob of louts, and the car tipped over the bank into the river. The local police were reinforced. Oldbury's mayor, an old fellow who owned the principal draper's shop in the town, and was English of the English, tried to insinuate himself between the parties as a sort of conciliatory patriarch. But Ensor did not want conciliation, and some of the younger men were with him. They wanted violence. They had it.

Oldbury's riot was a quite considerable one in its way. Backhouse was rung up about ten o'clock at night by the matron of the Infirmary.

"Can you come at once, doctor. There has been rioting. One or two bad cases."

The town seemed quiet enough when Backhouse walked down to the Infirmary. On the way he met the local police inspector with a couple of constables. Backhouse stopped and spoke to the inspector. He noticed that one of the constables had lost his helmet.

"I hear there has been trouble, inspector. The Infirmary has just rung me up."

"It is over now, sir. A bit lively while it lasted. I have had one or two officers laid out. We had to use our truncheons."

"How did it start?"

"There was a crowd out, sir. It fell foul of some young gents and ex-service men who were guarding old Mr. Hallam's house. Oh, yes, a few broken heads, and one pretty bad one."

"Anyone I know?"

"That fellow Ensor, sir. Someone got him, but I don't think it was

By Warwick Deeping

XV

one of my men, doctor. Well, a mad dog like that—"

"Is he at the Infirmary?"

"I had him taken there, sir. We should have wanted him—anyway. It was he who set that crowd of silly wild boys smashing things."

When Backhouse followed the matron into the surgery of the Infirmary he saw a figure lying on a stretcher and a nurse bending over it. A stolid, fair haired young constable stood at the head of the stretcher, looking down. On a bench sat three or four men with broken heads and bleeding faces. A second nurse was attending to them.

Backhouse paused by the stretcher, he could hear the heavy and stertorous breathing of Richard Ensor.

"May I look, nurse?"

"I'm sorry, doctor."

With an upward glance at Backhouse's grave face she moved aside, allowing him to see the face and head of Richard Ensor. Backhouse knelt down; the man on the stretcher was unconscious; his black hair was a matted tangle.

The young constable watched the doctor's face. It was curiously stern and thoughtful, as though the mind behind the face had been confronted with a problem far more serious than that of a broken head.

"Do you know how it happened, constable?"

"It was pretty dark, sir, and things were a bit lively. I don't think he got that from a truncheon, sir."

"No, hardly."

"More like an iron bar, sir, or a bit of heavy piping."

"I should think so."

Backhouse rose from his knees with that same very serious and thoughtful face. He stood looking down at the unconscious figure.

"Did you ring up Dr. Mott, matron?"

"Yes, he should be here any minute."

"I shall have to operate on that head. Get things ready, please, will you."

THE news of Richard Ensor's death was brought to Sybil by the man who had tried to save him.

He stood by the window, his back to her, with the green spaces of the Park sheeted in sunlight, each old tree ringed round with its own shadow. He spoke very quietly. She sat on the sofa and listened.

"I want to tell you how I felt when I saw him lying there. I want you to know. It was such a strange climax—such a judgment. My first feeling was one of gladness; I confess it. I was looking at a mad dog whom someone had hit on the head, a wise act, a right answer. And I thought—'Why should I try to save him? He is better dead, a poisoner of men's minds, a wild firebrand, an enemy of all the virtues generations of men have striven to evolve.' I saw him as a sort of human pest, a virulent thing which we doctors have to try and stamp out. I knew—that by letting him die I should be helping this wounded and disillusioned world. But—my dear—I could not do it."

She watched him with clear and devoted eyes.

"No, John—not you."

"I had to try and save him. The doctor's instinct, tradition, call it what you please. All these thoughts that passed through my head were no more than blown leaves. My job is to save life, or to try to save it—always—and everywhere."

"The healer."

"I tried. But the unknown man who struck that blow had struck too well. He never regained consciousness. Life's strange."

She rose softly and stood beside him.

"Poor, vain, spoilt child."

"Yes, he was just that. But how strange that he who preached violence should have had justice done to him in an obscure scuffle in the old town where he was born."

WARWICK DEEPING.

"POOR MR. MORTIMER!"

By WARWICK DEEPING

YOUTH (SHE)—AGE (HER LOVER)—TROUBLE



HE rain came down like a grey curtain; heavy June rain that splashed upon the leaves and dripped from them into the deep green grass.

Mrs. Henson sat at the French window. She had opened it wide, and she lay back in the chair with her book forgotten in her lap, for she loved such rain as this, summer rain that seemed to fall out of the heart of the sky into the heart of the green earth. It soothed her.

Not that she needed soothing. She was a happy woman, brown-haired, hazel-eyed, full of the gentle and laughing indolence of the woman who has learnt not to worry about wrinkles and grey hairs. She looked absurdly young, perhaps because she did not vex herself with struggling to retain the restlessness which is the spirit of youth.

The windows of the house gave on a garden sloping to a hedge of laurels and a white fence, and beyond the fence lay a good acre of common land planted with chestnuts and limes and surrounded by three sandy roads which enclosed the ground in the shape of a triangle. The vista was one of open woodland, green, dripping, pressing close upon the house. But little traffic passed upon the roads, an occasional car or wagon, or the baker's cart from the village. Hazel Henson loved looking at trees. Even in winter they were beautiful.

But Mrs. Henson had something else in her life, something which she loved in a different way, something which troubled her. Trees grow up and root themselves more deeply in the place of their birth; children grow up and wish to escape. Mrs. Henson's daughter wished to escape.

Not that the mother resented it; she was too wise for that. She remembered her own cage and how she had escaped from it twenty years ago, but her beating wings had not brought her happiness. When Sybil escaped her mother wished her to find happiness.

She sat up suddenly and her book slipped to the floor, for above the top of the laurel hedge glided a girl's head

and shoulders and a little cerise-coloured hat. She dismounted at the gate, and pushed her bicycle through it, her white dress wet and clinging, her tennis racquet dripping rain. Her black hair was over her ears. She came up the path with a suggestion of self-mockery, recklessness, defiance.

Her mother stood up.

"Well, of all the drowned rats! But—why—on earth—?"

She laughed, for laughter is a net that bruises no wings.

"Your poor racquet! I think the Tattons might have turned out their car."

The girl left her bicycle in the porch, and entered by the French window.

"I got bored, dear. We were just beginning when the rain started. And then we sat around in the drawing-room and talked about the curate's baby. The rain looked like going on for ever, and I made a dash for it."

Her wet skirt was dropping a circle of moisture on the polished boards of the floor; she had tossed her racquet into the arm-chair, and was taking off her cerise-coloured hat.

"Have you had tea?" her mother asked.

"I didn't wait for it."

"Go and change, poppet. And I will tell Alice to bring tea in a quarter of an hour."

Her daughter vanished, and passed up the stairs, swinging the rain from her little cerise-coloured hat, and Mrs. Henson went to the rescue of the creton cover of her arm-chair, removing the wet racquet and carrying it into the hall.

"Pique!" she thought. "Now I wonder what that particular young man did or did not do—to annoy her? Master Noel, I suppose! . . . Oh, Alice, we will have tea in a quarter of an hour. And Miss Sybil's bicycle is in the porch. Will you ask Smith to take it round to the stable?"

Tea had been waiting for ten minutes when the girl came in. She had let down her wet hair, and it hung down straight and black about the apathy of her pale and discontented face. She sat

down in a chair and stared out of the window at the trees, and her mother seemed to hear the voice of her own youth, crying: "Nothing but trees—beastly dripping trees! I hate the sight of them!"

Mrs. Henson smiled. She had a very expressive smile.

"How is the poor hat?"

"I don't know."

"I hope it's not spoilt, poppet, because it suits you so well and you will want it."

Sybil glanced quickly at her mother.

"Why?"

"It's just the thing for Henley. I have had a letter from Grace Hethersedge. She is having a house-party for Henley week and she has asked you to go."

The girl's dull eyes lit up.

"Oh, la-la! Henley! She's a real sport!"

So Sybil Henson went to spend a week with the Hethersedges at Hurley Court, and for three days her mother had no news of her, but when the first letter arrived it was hurried and ecstatic.

"I'm having a topping time. The crowd here is simply perfect. We are on the river all day, and we dance every evening. There is a Mr. Mortimer here—quite a posh person."

"Oh, I say, dear old thing, how much ought I to give the maid who is looking after me? And ought I to tip the butler? He looks like a bishop!"

Mrs. Henson smiled over the slangy, impulsive letter. Precise people might have quarrelled with it, and remarked upon the barbarism of the modern young woman, hinting that in their days young gentlewomen read Tennyson and wore modest skirts.

The second letter was even briefer and more rhapsodical.

"We nearly upset yesterday. I like Mr. Mortimer awfully. He has a lovely old place somewhere in Hampshire, and he used to row for Oxford."

"Kitty Hethersedge is to be spliced to a soldier boy, a real pukka soldier. I'm awfully bucked about it."

The third letter was more sedate but more dramatic.

"DEAR MUMSIE,

"John—that's Mr. Mortimer—has asked me to marry him, and I've said 'Yes.' He's a real dear, and though he is older than I, he looks quite young."

"John wants to come and see you. He says that he doesn't consider us engaged until you have said 'Yes,' awfully old-fashioned of him!—but I'm sure you'll like him. He's writing to you at once. I've suggested that he should bring me along on Monday."

Mr Mortimer's letter arrived by the next post, and Mrs. Henson opened it with a queer feeling that she was growing old.

"DEAR MRS. HENSON," he wrote,

"I have asked Sybil to marry me, but I feel that I cannot consider anything as settled until I have seen you and obtained your consent. I realize how deeply you must be concerned in Sybil's future and her happiness, as deeply as I am."

She liked his letter; it was a gentleman's letter, rather old-fashioned; also it puzzled her. It was not a young man's letter, for it was too mellow and too considerate.

"I wonder how old he is?" she thought.

She sat down and wrote her reply:

"DEAR MR. MORTIMER,

"I appreciate your attitude and its thoughtfulness. Of course Sybil's future means a very great deal to me."

"I shall be delighted to see you here; we can put you up. Sybil suggested that you should bring her back, and I think the suggestion an excellent one. You will find this place very quiet. And I think you will find me your friend."

"Sincerely yours

"HAZEL HENSON."

Next day she received a telegram.

"Very many thanks. Coming by car, Monday.—MORTIMER."

A happy indolence and a love of peace are the softening moisture of a woman's life, but on Monday Mrs. Henson was restless, even agitated. She wandered about the house, making sure that everything was as it should be; she gave elaborate directions to the servants, went into the details of every meal, and spent two hours arranging the flowers. Sybil should have every chance. The man should find that the girl he loved had come from a home that had charm and a quiet distinction.

She was standing at the French window when the car arrived—a big and luxurious four-seater with the luggage piled on the back seat. John Mortimer was driving, but Mrs. Henson did not get a clear view of him until they came in together through the white gate, and then she received a shock. Mortimer was old enough to be Sybil's father. She saw that at once and intuitively, for a woman of forty has an unerring eye for the age of a face, and though John Mortimer was fresh and vigorous and well-preserved, her own maturity recognized the maturity in him.

"Hallo, Mumsie!"

Sybil came a little shyly towards her mother. She was self-conscious, boyish almost in her hatred of visible emotion.

"Here we are. We ought to have been here an hour ago, but John's such a cautious soul."

Mrs. Henson kissed her and looked at the man. She liked him at once, and she was very hard to please.

"We need not be introduced, need we? . . . I approve of caution!"

He looked her straight in the eyes as he took her hand. She fancied that he was surprised, and she wondered what had surprised him.

"I had rather a valuable passenger, you know, Mrs. Henson. I'm old enough not to be provoked into recklessness, even by Sybil."

Mrs. Henson was troubled. It was obvious to her that John Mortimer had been attracted by Sybil's youth, but when, after dinner, he strolled out with the mother into the garden and talked to her of his engagement to her daughter she began to suffer from qualms of conscience.

"Sybil is very young," she said.

"Delightfully young! And I am still something of a boy. You know, Mrs. Henson, I have knocked about for twenty years, and now I want to settle down in a gentle, green place, just like this."

She asked him how old he was.

"Forty-three."

"And you mean to live in the country?"

"Right in the deeps of it. I have spent a great part of my life travelling—exploring; I have never loved crowds. I think that is why Sybil appeals to me so deeply; she is a country girl."

Mrs. Henson did not know what to say. What could she say? She had a sense of duty to them both, and a feeling of loyalty to her daughter, nor had she the heart to show this lover the real Sybil, the restless child who loathed the country and green trees. She liked the man and she loved her daughter.

"Sybil is so very young. I should like you to wait a year. Not that I believe in long engagements, but I do feel that both of you should be sure."

"I think a man knows," he said, "when the real thing comes. But I am quite ready to—"

She interrupted him, very gently:

"Please, I want you to realize that I feel responsible for both of you. I—I married impulsively, and it did not bring me happiness. So, you see."

He looked at her shyly, and with a sudden chivalrous admiration.

"Of course! Believe me, I appreciate what you have said. It is only fair that your love for Sybil should be considered—in every way. If you will agree to the engagement, I promise to wait a year."

"Thank you," she said.

* * * * *

John Mortimer spent a succession of week-ends at Wilford Green. He brought his car with him, and he seemed to love nothing better than some quiet unsensational pilgrimage to any town or village that was old, and for the first few days Sybil seemed to share his enthusiasm. She looked at churches, potted about in old furniture shops, pic-nicked on hill-tops and on the edge of woods. The car was a novelty; so was a rich lover.

And Hazel Henson watched, studying their faces when they returned.

A month passed before she saw the beginnings of a disillusionment, the thing which she had feared. Sybil came in alone with a sulky, defiant face. Usually they came in together, after John had driven the car into Mrs. Henson's coach-house.

"Well, what have you seen to-day?"

"Oh—churches—just churches! John seems to dote on churches. I wanted to go to Brighton."

"And you did not go to Brighton?"

"He said it was too far."

There had been a breeze, a clashing of personalities, and when Mortimer came in Hazel saw that he was bothered. Sybil had gone to her room, and her lover sat down and talked to her mother.

"I have been wondering," he said, "whether Sybil would care for a month in town. I know it is the dead season, but my aunt, Mrs. Maxsen, would give her quite a good time."

"I'm sure she would love it," said her mother.

He looked troubled, perplexed.

"The fact is, you know, a man of forty is apt to get rather selfish."

She was lying back in her chair, her eyes turned towards the long window and the quiet trees.

"I don't think I should call you selfish, John."

"A bit set, stiff in the uptake!"

She smiled, and he thought how young she looked, and what a charming and restful atmosphere she had.

"People want different things."

He gave a quick lift of the head,

seemed about to say something, and remained silent.

"You see, I'm just twenty years older than Sybil, but I understand her all the better for that."

"Twenty years!" he said. And added, with subtle irrelevance: "Why, you are younger than I am."

Sybil went to stay with Mrs. Maxsen in Berkeley Square, and for a fortnight Mrs. Henson was left peacefully and utterly alone, and though the experience was not new to her she was conscious of feeling lonely.

"When Sybil goes," she said to herself, "I shall become an old woman. The child is luckier than I was. This man of hers is a dear." But she did not feel happy about the coming marriage, and her unhappiness involved her in thoughts which she carefully suppressed. "Don't be an idiot!" she exclaimed. "Women of forty are apt to be sentimental."

She assumed a serene, autumnal calmness, and assured herself that she was ready to play the part of spectator, and to smile and nod like a grandmother when life went by and past her. She cultivated a mood of detachment, and then youth rushed in and she was back once more with the living.

She had dined. She was sitting at the open window, watching the dusk falling upon the trees, when she heard the latch of the gate click and saw a young man come in through the laurels. He stood there a moment, his hesitation strangely suggestive of a passionate perplexity. Mrs. Henson sat up and waved a hand.

"Noel!"

His hesitation disappeared, giving place to a fierce awkwardness. He came up to the window and stood there, stiff and inarticulate.

"Sybil's away?"

"Yes, she is staying in town."

He glared at the rug, fidgeted, and kept moistening his lips with his tongue.

"Mrs. Henson, is it true that Sybil—?"

She nodded.

"Quite true. Hadn't you heard?"

He did not answer her; he walked to the gate, loitered a moment, and then came back.

"Don't think me beastly rude, but—you see—I was dead keen on Sybil; and I thought she cared for me, just a little. I didn't hear till I came back to-day from Scotland."

"Poor Noel!"

"It was my fault. We had a bit of a tiff one day in the summer, just before

I went up north. I thought it would be all right, you know. I thought she cared a little."

"Perhaps she did."

Youth goes towards youth, and this forlorn lover left Mrs. Henson wondering whether Sybil had cared for him; and if so, how deeply she had cared. The heart of a young girl is often a very shallow vessel, and Sybil was a thing of impulses, and very young.

"Was it pique?" thought her mother. "I wonder! I am rather worried, for John's sake."

She had been made the recipient of one confession, but she did not suspect that she was to be converted into a universal *confidante* and asked to parcel out her sympathy between three people. On the following afternoon she was cutting off dead flowers in the garden when the maid came to announce a visitor.

"Mr. Mortimer, madam."

"Mr. Mortimer!"

"He is in the drawing-room."

She went in, her heart beating a little less calmly than usual, and she caught him looking at something on the mantelpiece, a photograph of herself. He was embarrassed; so was she, but they ignored each other's embarrassment. She saw that he looked unhappy and worried.

"I never expected you."

"No, of course not. I hope I'm not in the way?"

"I don't think so! Do sit down, we'll have tea."

They sat down and talked about all sorts of things that did not matter, and with a cheerfulness that sedulously avoided any possible problem. Mrs. Henson noticed that he looked at her as though she were a piece of precious china that was not to be touched save by the most devoted and careful hands. His eyes confused her. She felt angry with herself, with him.

When tea was over he made the remark for which she had been waiting.

"I want to talk to you. May I?"

"Of course. . . . Do smoke."

He got up and stood by the window, and lit a cigarette. It was obvious to her that he did not know how to begin.

"It is about Sybil?" she suggested.

"Yes."

He turned and faced her.

"I want to be quite honest. The fact is—Sybil is not happy. I have seen it growing; I know."

"And you?"

"Oh, my happiness need not be considered!"

"On the contrary, it is just as important as Sybil's. Please tell me."

"I will. The fact is, I'm too old. I did not realize it until I began to try and play the game of youth. I'm too slow for her, too set. What I mean is—I saw that she was beginning to chafe. It's natural; it's my fault. I want you to help."

He turned away and stood looking at the trees. There was a short silence.



He turned and faced her. "I want to be quite honest. The fact is—Sybil is not happy"

"Of course I will help. But I think you ought to tell me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Do you still care?"

She saw him stiffen.

"Need that be considered? I mean—eliminate me; I'm pretty tough."

Her lips quivered; she gave him a queer, mother-look.

"My dear friend," she said, "young people are much tougher than we are. I want you to tell me. Are you still in love with Sybil?"

"No, I'm not," he said, almost savagely as though he was ashamed and angry.

And then he turned on her.

"But don't think—the fact is—Sybil is not in love with me. I feel it; I know it. But it has got to be arranged so that she shall not be hurt."

She bent her head.

"John," she said, "I am very grateful to you. Will you let the matter wait until I have seen Sybil? She comes home to-morrow."

"I am in your hands. I do not ask to be in better hands."

A faint colour showed on her beautiful, mature face.

"Oh, well, I will be fair to all of you."

"All? You mean——?"

"There is someone else—a boy."

"Thank God!" he said, and then walked straight out of the French window as though that impulsive exclamation could not be explained.

Sybil returned next day, and from the very way she kissed her Hazel knew that her daughter was unhappy.

"Had a good time, dear?"

"Oh, mumsie, I'm miserable!"

Later, sitting on a cushion with her head on her mother's knees, she poured out her confession.

"It's no use; John's a dear, but I don't love him; he bores me. Don't think me a little beast, mumsie, for I

really am awfully cut up! I hate the idea of hurting him, but it has got to be."

"John was here yesterday, poppet."

"Here!"

"Yes. John understands more than you think. He wishes you to break off the engagement because he realizes that he is too old for you, and that neither of you would be happy."

"The dear old sport! That's just it. We started having quite a gay time in town, and then I began to feel that the things I cared for bored him. I wanted to go so much faster than he did, I could almost see him getting out of breath—not really, but figuratively, you know."

Her mother gave a little, silent laugh.

"He felt the same; he told me so. But, poppet, isn't there anyone else?"

Sybil's mouth hardened.

"No. There might have been——"

"I know someone who is very miserable. He heard only a few days ago, and he came to see me."

"Not Noel?"

"Yes, Noel."

"I'll never forgive him," said the girl. "Oh, yes, you will," said the mother.

Sybil wrote to John Mortimer that night. She thought of him very kindly as "poor dear old thing," and she pictured him as desolated and overwhelmed.

"I hope he won't be too terribly upset."

"I think he expects the news, poppet."

It is possible that Sybil might have felt piqued had she been able to watch John's face when he read her letter. He smiled. He looked happier than he looked for weeks. And then he lit a pipe, lay back in his chair, and went off into a reverie.

Sybil waited a week before she allowed Noel Symonds to see her. He called every day and talked to Sybil's mother, who reassured him as to the finality of the other "fellow's renunciation."

"He must be a bit of a sport!" said the young man.

"I think he is," said Sybil's mother.

Early in October a deputation of two

waited upon Hazel Henson and announced its views upon the future.

"You see," said the lover, "we think we ought to wait a little while before making it public. Consideration for Mortimer, you know."

"Yes, it would be more decent to poor old John," said the girl.

Mrs. Henson agreed with them.

"I have just had a letter from him. He is coming down to see me next week."

The deputation looked very worried.

"I suppose he ought to be told?"

"I'll tell him," said Mrs. Henson.

It was pure chance that brought youth into the autumn garden at the very moment when Hazel Henson was explaining the niceties of the affair to John Mortimer. Sybil and her lad did not know that John had arrived; he had turned up two hours before he was due. They were crossing the tennis lawn and had reached the arch in the yew hedge when Sybil saw her mother and John Mortimer standing together at the far end of the grass-walk between the broad herbaceous borders. They appeared to be looking at the Michaelmas daisies, and yet they were not looking at them.

Sybil stared. Then she laid a quick hand on Noel's arm, and made him face about and return to the house.

"I think John's a little upset—about us," she said.

"Your mother was breaking the news to him."

"Yes. Poor old dear!"

But on the grass path between the purple and blue masses of the autumn daisies two people were standing close together, not looking at each other, but very conscious of each other's nearness. In fact the man's left hand had a very gentle grip of the woman's fingers.

"You'll be lonely, you know, when Sybil goes."

"Perhaps I shall," she agreed.

"I'm—I'm rather lonely, too. Hazel, I must tell you the truth."

"Ssh!" she said presently. "We must not shock the old people."



SATISFIED

IF one there be to walk with me
When day is at an end;
A kindred soul to talk with me;
A loving, kindly friend,

I care not, though each part of me
Be torn with daily strife.
The love within the heart of me
Is all I ask of life.

Harry Varley.

THE POWER OF

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING MAY 1933

8

Rich, indomitable, with a passion for speed, the woman they called "The Empress" was at last outraced by her own broken heart.

WHEN people said of her: "She has the brain of a man," and she heard of the saying, she was angry.

"Thanks. Supposing they allow me the brain of a woman. It may suffice."

It sufficed to keep the neighbourhood in awe of her. She was forty-one years old and confessed to it, the widow of an indifferent husband, the mother of a son at Eton. When Jimmy Gore of Pent-

hill Park had married her she had brought him a mistress for his house and much money. Jimmy Gore, big-nosed and lanky, and foolish, had controlled neither his wife nor her money. An incurable philanderer, and convincing only on the hunting field, straddling a horse, he had had no happiness with her, nor she with him.

"Poor old Jimmy!"

With such words the county had

expressed its prejudices, and she, wise as to the unfriendliness of her neighbours, met it with a cold and blue-eyed scorn. She was not "county." She was the daughter of old Bragg, who had been a Cotton King in the days before the war. He had left her a million and a half, and though the world might accept her money, it had not accepted the Catharine in her. It sometimes spoke of her as the Empress.



Mrs. Gore spoke to Sir Alfred Gedge about Lionel. "My boy wants to race." Sir Alfred looked grave. "Yes—I know."

CONCRETE THINGS

By WARWICK DEEPING

Penthill had been Gore for seven generations. It lay in a little parkland valley that was like a natural amphitheatre, and within twenty miles of it three midland towns trailed smoke from their factory chimneys. Penthill was oak and old England; these towns were all socialism and steel. The Gores and others like them had clung to the aloofness of the old landed gentry. The county tradition, not a little embittered

by penal taxation, still struggled and endured.

It was at a meet of the Arden pack that the news first got abroad. Sir Richard Joyce was the announcer.

"Have you heard what that woman's going to do?"

Mrs. Gore was their "that woman," and she knew it.

"What?"

"Turn Penthill into a racing track."

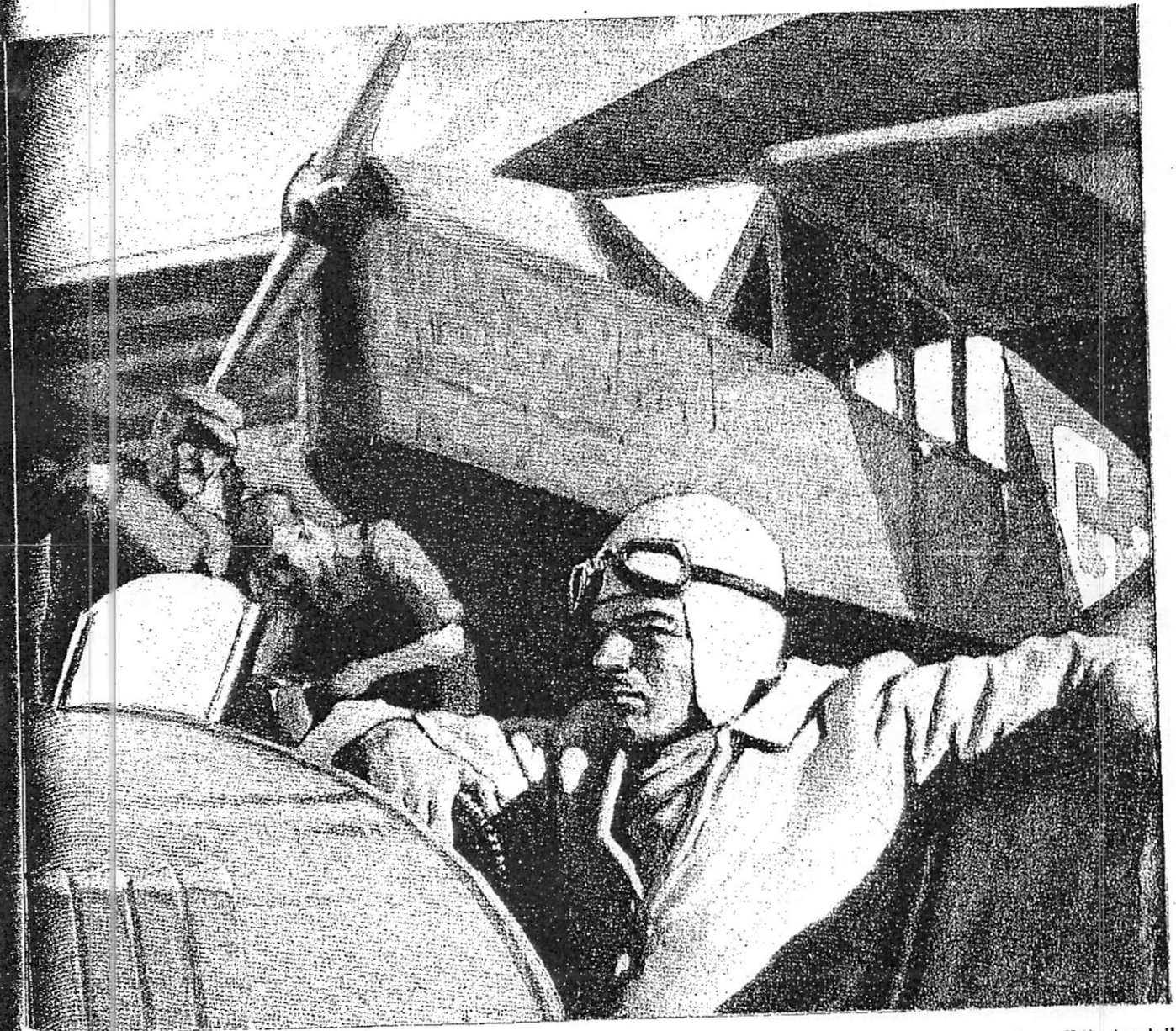
"For gee-gees?"

"Good heavens, no! A great concrete saucer for racing cars, with an aerodrome in the middle of it."

"You're pulling legs."

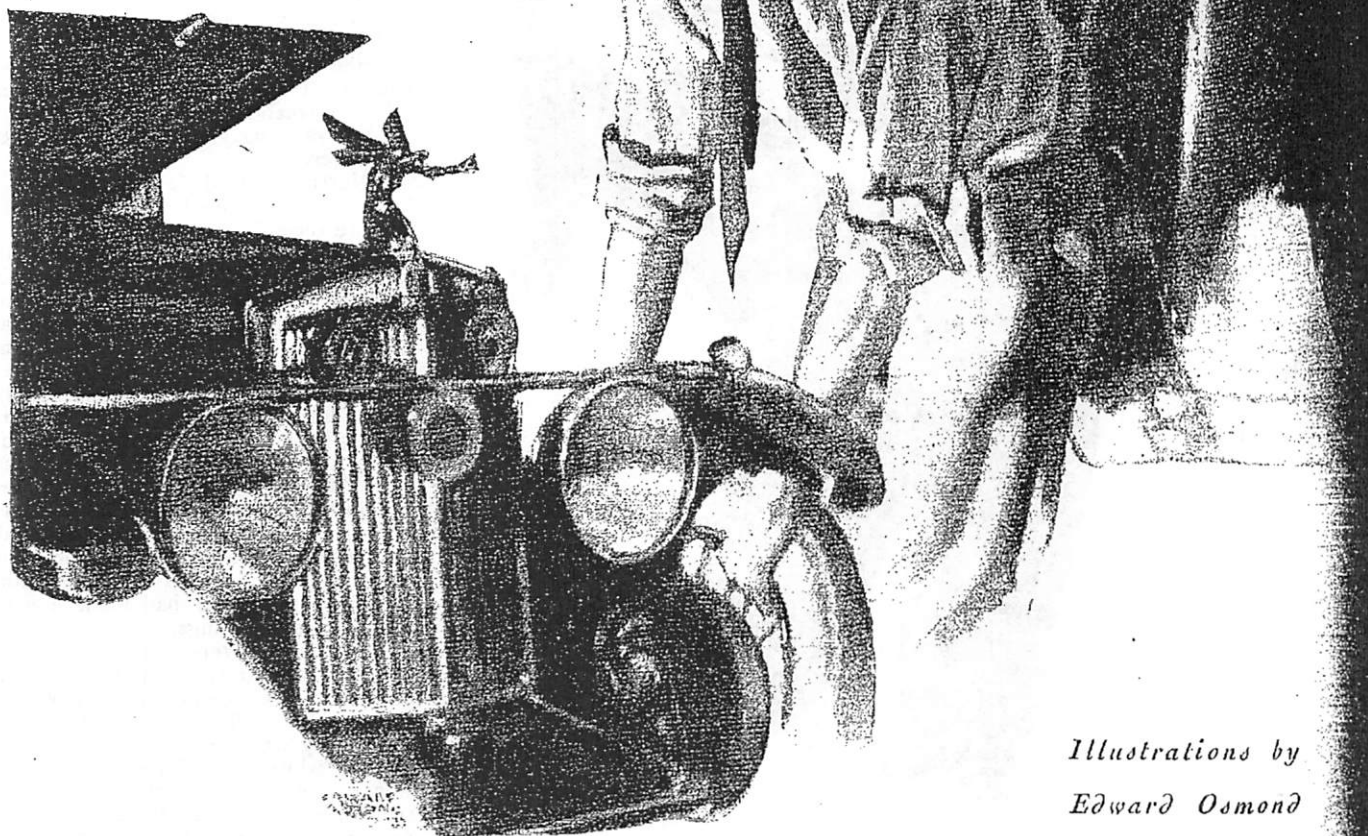
"I'm not. We are to have progress right in the middle of things. Motor-bikes in swarms, young fellow-my-lads in stunt cars. She says——"

"But, my dear chap, the thing will cost her——"



"And you?" "Nothing doing, dear lady. I may choose to risk my own life; that's my affair. I'd keep your boy off the track."

The girl said to Lionel—"Righto. If you aren't allowed to drive I'll take you round as my passenger some day"



*Illustrations by
Edward Osmond*

"Well, I suppose she has a million to play with. It's the imperial touch. She always was a thruster."

She was more than that. She was a woman consumed by an insatiable restlessness, by a passion for power and the urge to express that power in concrete things. She loved speed, because speed expressed power. She herself drove the fastest car in the county, and on occasions she drove it to the disgust and the dismay of the county. She had cut across the noses of hounds in full cry, and she had done it wilfully.

A furious M.F.H. had cornered her in a lane.

"Hang it, woman, must you bring that anti-aircraft gun of yours into action just when my hounds—?"

She had looked up at him with a little, frosty smile.

"I have no objection to your hounds. Isn't your attitude a little obsolete?"

For, if she had experienced certain enmities, the shadow of a culture that

was a trifle supercilious, she was capable of countering it. The battle had been boiling up for years. She was the daughter of old Tom Bragg, and these people had always assumed her to be Bragg. She had hated their red faced, wooden correctness, their suggestion of hereditary finality. She did not understand them and their women, or was it that she understood them too well?

But this was her gesture to the Vale of Arden and its squirearchy. If Arden had been oak, Penthill should be steel and concrete. She would out-Brooklands Brooklands. Ballingham, Foxhampton and Coalfield should have their testing ground and racing track. She, too, would drive her car at over a hundred miles an hour round Penthill Park. She would show these people what a woman could do.

She may not have realised that she would be the worst hated woman in the Vale of Arden. She would have welcomed such hate. Desecration—indeed! Was not speed more fascinating

and significant than a few hundred senile trees?

Never had she been more pleased than when the great men of the Vale appealed to her, and threatened.

"Mrs. Gore, are you serious about this scheme?"

Oh, yes, she was quite serious about it. And what was the objection?

"Haven't you any feeling for this piece of country. We people have lived in it—"

Her smile was ironical.

"Too long!"

"We shall fight you."

"Just how?"

"The law."

"What can the law do? I create work for thousands. I develop the land you cannot sell. Go ahead with your fighting. I shall love it."

She was too strong for them and she knew it. These obsolete rustics and their pride in mere useless acres! She had the urge of the age behind her, its restlessness, its haste. The opposi-



tion seethed for a while, and then sank into a sullen acceptance of that which her money made inevitable. She did not hear the things that were said of her, but she could divine them. She was mad, a super-egotist, a public menace. Someone had got at her. She had become infatuated with some swash-buckling boy in a beret. She was inflamed with a furious spite against her neighbours. She was crude concrete confronting old oak with the polish of centuries.

She smiled, and continued to be busy with lawyers, bankers and contractors.

A Scotch firm secured the contract, and the work began. Penthill ceased to be Penthill as the Vale had known it. Nearly every tree in the park was felled, and the green hillside became a great raw wound. A light railway was constructed for the removal of soil and the use of the excavators, and a small army of navvies, housed in old army huts, gave the Vale much to talk about. They were a rough crowd. They

poached, pillaged orchards, took possession of the village pubs, and challenged the chastity of the whole countryside. Two police constables were badly knocked about. One gentleman who surprised three young toughs in his garden was thrown through the window of a garden frame.

The whole business was an abomination, and from the Vale perpetual protests poured in upon Mrs. Gore. She passed them on to Mr. Wigram, her agent, who—in his turn—passed them to the contractors. The Scots were dour and sardonic. Did the Vale think that a two-mile concrete track could be built without someone making a mess?

That she had become a social outcast so far as the Vale was concerned was obvious to Catharine Gore. Hardly did she trouble to recognise the reality until young Lionel, aged fifteen, and home for the summer holidays, found that he was involved in the Vale's feud against his mother. Lion, as he was called, had discovered a little romance

of his own at "Shirleys," a girl, Joan Lester, but at "Shirleys" he was welcome no longer.

"You seem to have put people's backs up, mater."

"Oh? Have they included you, Lion?"

They had, or rather Joan Lester had. She had her own particular grievance against Penthill. Someone had stolen her beloved Airedale, one of the navvies—probably.

"She showed me the gate."

"Really!"

"She said we had poisoned the whole county. I say, it's a bit thick, mater. We're ostracised."

She was angry, but she dissembled her anger.

"Narrow-minded fools. They're a hundred years behind the times. We'll educate them."

But Lionel understood that education can be a painful process when certain persons are prejudiced against being educated. He was more sensitive than his mother. He liked to be liked, and being somewhat the son of his father, he belonged to the Vale. He missed the tennis, and the bathing in Sir Richard Joyce's lake, and the rambles with Joan Lester, the shooting and the cub-hunting. He was not a lad to thrust himself in through unfriendly doors. Also, he was a little shocked by the upheavals at Penthill. The place was almost unrecognisable, a kind of human ant-hill. Certainly, the mater had made a marvellous mess of things.

Three years were consumed in the building of that track, and at the end of three years Penthill was almost unrecognisable. The park had become a bald and grassy space surrounded by a glaring white rim. The grassy space was an aerodrome, with hangars and repair shops. Penthill House itself, with certain raw, red additions, had been transformed into a club-house and offices. Mrs. Gore occupied one wing of it. A huge, galvanised iron building provided accommodation for cars. There were stands for spectators, refreshment rooms, a car paddock, miles of ugly iron railings. Sir Richard Joyce, going to look at the new Penthill, compared it to a vast spittoon fitted with a green glass container.

Mrs. Gore drove the first car round the track, a racing "Hawk." She had a well-known racing motorist as her passenger, Sir Alfred Gedge, and perhaps for the first time in his life Sir Alfred was frightened. They touched ninety, but Mrs. Gore took the banking too high, and the Hawk developed a fearsome skid. They got out of it somehow, and Sir Alfred persuaded her to let him take control.

"This track needs trying out, dear lady. You may have tremendous nerve—"

She was much less frightened than he was.

"Only a skid."

Sir Alfred knew all about skidding. He had cultivated the art.

"Quite so, but there are skids and skids. (Continued on page 102)

JACOBSEAN

(Regd.)

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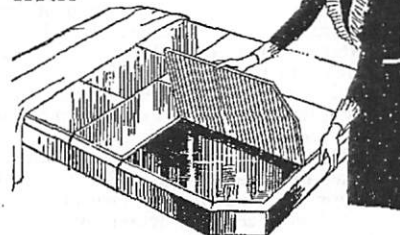


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THE POWER OF CONCRETE THINGS

(Continued from page 9)

You can't take liberties until you know your track and your car, upside down and inside out."

He drove the Hawk five times round the track, and during the last lap he pushed her to ninety-nine.

"That's about her limit. Yes, the banking's not so bad. By the way, don't let your boy try stunts here."

Her lips looked decisive.

"He won't. I have told him the track is taboo."

Lionel was eighteen, and it did occur to Sir Alfred Gedge that Master Lionel might flout his mother, but it so happened that young Gore was at the moment more interested in poetry than in cars. It was a phase, but a very potent phase, youth's first realisation of its own strangeness and mysterious discontents. Lionel, as a sonneteer, was writing verse to a rather decadent lady of seven and thirty whom he had met at a Chelsea cocktail party. And the lady was encouraging him. He was a nice-looking lad.

The official opening of the Penthill Track took place on the August Bank Holiday. For a first meeting it was a considerable success, certain novel features having been introduced into some of the races. Mrs. Gore had presented a prize for the principal event. It was to be known as "The Midland Gold Vase," and would be competed for yearly by cars of the highest class. She and her committee had worked very hard to secure entries. The Penthill Club was to be a social centre as well as a racing track and an aerodrome. It possessed four hard courts, a bathing pool, and a dance floor.

Some seven thousand people passed through the gates. The cars parked in the paddock numbered nine hundred and thirty-three. The caterers served about two thousand lunches and four thousand teas. No less than seventeen private planes flew to Penthill and landed in the aerodrome. There were no accidents. The *Ballingham Mercury* printed a very enthusiastic notice. It even hailed Mrs. Gore in a leading article as a very notable woman who was helping to make history.

That night when she and her committee met in the Club House to review the day's affairs, they could congratulate their chairwoman and each other. It was a very small committee, and it consisted of Mr. Wigram, three experts and the lady. Mr. Wigram, a man who took life and finance somewhat seriously, was the least sanguine member of the party. The gate-money did not satisfy him.

"I think—in future—we ought to make the entrance three and sixpence instead of five shillings. Let the paddock remain at ten shillings."

Mrs. Gore took him up.

"Drop our price after the first meeting? Confess to the public—"

Mr. Wigram explained his view, but patiently so.

"May I suggest that our public will come mainly from the manufacturing towns, lads on motor-bikes, people in small cars? To such a public there is a difference between five shillings and three and sixpence, especially if we set out to make it a family affair."

"Yes, and to cover the loss we should have to increase our gate by forty per cent. I think Mr. Wigram is prematurely—"

She carried the committee with her, for though Penthill had become a company, she owned ninety per cent. of the shares. She was Penthill.

A set of regulations had been drawn up by her experts for the guidance of drivers

at race meetings, but for testing and mere private speeding, the restrictions were merely formal. It was her idea that the Club, the aerodrome and the track should produce a daily revenue from the public. Penthill would be useful as a testing ground to the factories of Ballingham and Foxhampton, and she rather expected the young bloods of the Midlands to come and try out their cars for speed.

She proposed to Mr. Wigram that they should advertise the possible adventure.

"Drive your own car at Penthill. For the use of the track—10s."

Mr. Wigram did not like that advertisement, but he had it inserted in various papers. He thought the temptation both cheap and dangerous, but that which Mrs. Gore proposed might be considered *lucky*. She called it her challenge to youth, but when Lionel suffered one of youth's sudden transformations, she would have none of it. Lionel, now up at Cambridge, had ceased to be interested in sonnets and rather sophisticated ladies. He had fallen under the fascination of an audacious young thing in a beret, who owned and drove a small sports-model at furious speeds. She provoked in Lionel both passion and emulation.

What! His mother owned Penthill, and he had not driven a car round the track? Well—really!

His mother allowed young Lionel a thousand a year. To her, money was the most potent power on earth, and when her son proposed to try the track, she issued her ultimatum.

"Out of bounds, Lion."

"But, mater—"

"Absolutely and utterly—until you are twenty-one. If you take a car on that track I'll cut off your allowance."

He was not a little afraid of his mother as his father had been before him.

"But you let other fellows—"

She did, but to her, Lionel was different. He was her son, the one creature in the world who could cast a shadow across her rather cold and callous soul. Moreover, she had ambitions of her own with regard to Lionel. He had ability and a temperament, and it was just this temperament of his that made her cautious.

About that time Sir Alfred Gedge came to spend a week at the Penthill Club house. He was testing a special model on the track, and Mrs. Gore spoke to him about Lionel.

"My boy wants to race."

Sir Alfred looked grave.

"Yes—I know all about that. He has been at me. He wanted me to take him out with me in the 'Red Terror.'"

"And you?"

"Nothing doing, dear lady. I may choose to risk my own life; that's my affair."

She said: "You're a white man. But just tell me, Lion's rather highly strung. He may have the courage, but something more than courage is required. Nerve, touch, instant decision, a sort of steeliness."

He nodded.

"Exactly. I'm a bit of a psychologist. If there is a crash coming it will come almost inevitably to the chap who is least fitted to deal with it. I'd keep your boy off the track."

She said: "I will."

The iron gates of the track were kept locked, and she gave orders—most stringent orders—to those responsible, that those gates were not to be unlocked for her son. Instant dismissal would be the penalty for disobedience.

But she was not worrying about other

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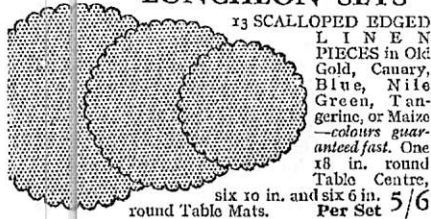
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THE POWER OF CONCRETE THINGS

women's sons, and one day in September Penthill had its first fatal smash. A lad named Clive, who owned a semi-derelect racing car that should have been relegated to the scrap-heap, paid his ten shillings, and flung his poor old rattletrap at the concrete. He had said—"I'll bet the old bus will do seventy." She did it, shed a wheel, and killed him.

Mr. Wigram was much troubled. He came up to say certain things to Mrs. Gore.

"We can't let any irresponsible lad who pays ten bob—"

"Youth's youth. It takes risks."

"Yes, that's all very well, but we are offering youth a death-trap."

She was annoyed with Mr. Wigram. He was being emotional.

"Don't talk like that. I agree that there should be some supervision. And I will agree to each car being inspected before it is allowed to use the track."

"And who is to do the inspecting?"

"Let Sanders. He's a good mechanic, and has sense."

"Then I take it that any car in reasonable condition is to be allowed—"

"Of course. Let the driver be warned."

Mr. Wigram was not happy about it, but he had a wife and three children to think of, and jobs do not grow on gooseberry bushes.

But, next day, young Clive's mother came to Penthill. She was a haggard woman of fifty, and her grief was bitter in her. She insisted on seeing Catharine Gore.

She said to her: "You've killed my son."

Mrs. Gore grew cold as ice. She froze in the presence of what she would have called undisciplined emotion.

"Please don't make wild statements. I'm sorry, but—"

"He should never have been allowed . . . it was an old car."

Mrs. Gore found the obvious retort.

"But you allowed him to drive that car."

"Oh, you don't understand. I never thought—"

"Exactly . . . and you come and accuse me—"

Mrs. Clive, with a face of tragedy, rose, walked to the door, and gasped out her accusation.

"He was my only child—I won't wish you—I gather that all you care about is money. But what's the use? You are made of the same stuff as your dreadful track. That's all I have to say."

Mrs. Gore despised women like Mrs. Clive. They were sentimental and silly; they spoiled their husbands and sons, and when life took its revenge upon their silliness, they became hysterical and rushed around looking for a scapegoat. Lionel's mother was angry. If you conceived and created anything that was big and significant, you would be surrounded by a crowd of little futile people accusing you of a callous and monstrous egotism. But she sent for Mr. Wigram.

"I have had that boy's mother here. Having seen her, I can understand that the lad was a fool. I think I agree with you that we should try to protect both ourselves and the fools. An accident is bad business."

Mr. Wigram looked at her queerly. Most certainly she was a remarkable woman, and he was glad that the supply of such women was limited.

"You wish me to take steps?"

"No driver under twenty-one years of age is to be allowed on the track."

"We are to demand copies of birth certificates?"

"Don't be facetious. Exercise dis-

cretion. And no car that is more than three years old."

Mr. Wigram assented with the air of a man who was being compelled to sit in the seat of Solomon. Secretly, he was determined to exclude all irresponsible youngsters with a misguided confidence in themselves and their machines. The loss of revenue from that source would be negligible. He was a pessimist with regard to Penthill as a financial adventure.

But in October Penthill produced two other tragedies. A visiting aeroplane piloted by a lady in a hurry and taking off carelessly, without proper attention to the wind, stalled, side-slipped, crashed, and killed its two occupants. There was the usual inquest, but no prejudice could be attached to Penthill. In the case of young Clive, the jury had added a rider to the verdict that had not been flattering to the Penthill management.

In the second case a young man who had had some experience of racing, appeared with a car and a girl. The car was the girl's, but he did not say so. He wanted to show off the car and himself. Oh, yes, everything was o.k.; he was no green hand.

Wigram gave him his permit. The secretary had just returned to the office when the track telephone rang.

"There's been a crash, sir."

"Not those two?"

"Yes. Just by the paddock. Will you ring up for a doctor and the ambulance?"

"Good heavens! Serious?"

"I'm afraid the lady's dead, sir. The man's a bit knocked about, but I don't think it's fatal."

The girl had been thrown out and killed. She, too, was an only child. The man recovered. But again the coroner's jury had serious suggestions to make with regard to the selection and the supervision of those using the track.

The Vale, watchful and hostile, heard one of its inhabitants refer to Mrs. Gore as "Jezebel." The name stuck. She had been ruthless in her treatment of the Vale, and the Vale claimed an eye for an eye.

The dead girl's father wrote a bitter letter to Mrs. Gore. He also wrote a bitter letter to one of the most popular daily papers, and the paper published the letter. This was much more serious. The letter challenged both the safety of the track and the humanity of those who controlled it. The father of the dead girl suggested that the attitude of the management was callous and cynical.

Mrs. Gore instructed her lawyers to take the matter up. She accused the editor of attempting a sensational stunt and demanded a retraction and an apology, but the editor knew both his public and his proprietor. The paper was open to the views of its readers. It was not to be threatened or cajoled. It held aloft the torch of truth.

Mrs. Gore exclaimed: "Infamous humbug!"

Those responsible for the paper invited her to come out into the open and join issue with them. Her lawyers advised her to do nothing of the kind. Why not indulge in a human and magnanimous gesture, and attempt to conciliate an embittered parent? But she would not. She said: "When people kill themselves on an arterial road, the press does not work up a stunt. I won't subject myself to sensationalism. Let it drop."

Yet, the Vale would have said that she herself had been guilty of the most gross sensationalism in conceiving and creating Penthill Track.

Meanwhile her own son was suffering



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THE POWER OF CONCRETE THINGS

from secret dissatisfactions. He had been dared to do a certain thing, and his response to the challenge had not been convincing.

"I promised the mater I wouldn't—" The girl was not exactly contemptuous, but she did allow him to understand that if he was that sort of tame saint she would cease to be interested. Moreover, young Lionel had other reasons for feeling like a white rabbit in a hutch. His mother's refusal to let him use the track contained an even more subtle questioning of his courage. Did she think he hadn't either the nerve or the skill?

Also, the girl had said to him: "Righto. If you aren't allowed to drive I'll crash in some day and take you round as my passenger."

He did not forget those ironical words. They kept recurring. They reminded him of a very unpleasant and hefty fellow at school who, whenever his path had crossed that of Lionel's, had tilted young Gore's hat over his eyes or tweaked his hair.

It was during the Easter vac. that Lionel challenged the autocrat in the house.

"I say, mater, about the track?"

She knew at once that he was going to ask her to withdraw her veto.

"Nothing doing, Lion."

"Why? Do you think I'm such a futile fool? You know, lots of our chaps are car-mad, and when they ask me about the track and I have to say that I have never been round it, they think I'm yellow or an utter idiot."

She countered his attack by telling him what Sir Alfred Gedge had said, though the expert's warning might have been applied by her to other people's sons.

"It is not an amateur's job. The trouble is that when an inexperienced lad finds himself on the track he becomes a little intoxicated. He takes too many risks — without having the experience to justify them. We think of putting in some new regulations."

He wanted to know about these regulations, and she explained them to him. No novice was to be allowed to take a car on the track if that car was capable of travelling at more than sixty miles an hour. A racing driver's education had to be gradual.

"But supposing the chap does more than sixty?"

"He will be timed and watched, and if he breaks the rule he will be stopped and ordered off."

"It might not be so easy to stop him. Look here, mater, let me take the old 'Windsor' round the track. She's as safe as a barge, and can't do more than fifty."

She refused. Like many strong-minded people she was foolishly firm.

"Nothing doing. Wait till you are a little older."

A few days later Sir Alfred Gedge arrived with a car that he was to drive at the Spring Meeting. It was a super-car, somebody's "Special," and with it he expected to collect one or two records, but before racing, the machine needed two or three days' tuning and testing. Other cars and other drivers were arriving, and Penthill became vocal. Engines, suddenly accelerated, roared like beasts restless for the arena. The green silence of the Vale was disturbed by the activities of the track, and by the noise of cruising and circling aeroplanes. "Mechanical blowflies," Sir Richard Joyce called them.

The lad who had been dared was at home, and the roar of the racing cars challenged him. Now, Lionel was finding out things quietly for himself. He spent a morning watching Sir Alfred and his

mechanics at work upon the "Special." For a racing car, Sir Alfred's machine was a sweet-tempered starter, and Sir Alfred, who was a very popular person, was a little careless as to the housing of his car. Interested sabotage is not unknown in the motor-racing world, but Sir Alfred Gedge had never been the victim of it. The "Special" was left in an unlocked shed. Also, Lionel had found out where the key of the track gates was kept at night. It hung on a nail in Mr. Wigram's office, and the office was on the ground floor and could be entered through a broken window.

On that fatal morning Catharine Gore woke just when the day was dawning. In the grey stealth and stillness she heard the birds in the Penthill gardens breaking into song. And then, to her ears came that other and unexpected sound, the sudden reverberations of the engine of a racing car. Was someone carrying out a secret and early morning trial?

She slipped out of bed and put on a dressing-gown. Up above on the roof of Penthill House a glass lantern had been erected, from which it was possible to observe the track. She had opened her door, and was making her way along the gallery, when she became aware of a bedroom door standing open. Lionel's door! She hurried to it. The room was empty.

For a moment she stood hesitant and angry. Had Gedge gone out on an early adventure, broken his promise to her, and taken Lionel with him? She rushed up to the observatory on the roof. She was just in time to see the red racing car glide out through the iron gates. There was no passenger.

And then she understood. She hurried down to her room, put on a pair of shoes, and let herself out of the house. A private path through the garden led down to the track, and as she ran, she heard the red car giving tongue. Its roar seemed to fill the silent valley.

She came to the track. The car was on the further rim of the great concrete saucer. She could see it like a red streak against the grey banking, and she was frightened and angry. She walked into the middle of the track and waited. Her one thought was to stop that car, and she was so full of her purpose that she forgot that there might be danger in interference. She heard the roar of the approaching "Special," and, standing there with her arms spread in the middle of the track she was a figure of fate.

Lionel saw her too late. The crisis was upon him, a crisis such as an expert might have handled. There was a moment of fateful hesitation. He braked. The red car swerved. Its tail swung round. It missed the figure of Catharine Gore, overturned, and went crashing into the iron railings.

For a moment the mother stood there in her bright blue gown, her arms still raised, her eyes staring. She saw the smashed and twisted railings, the big car with its wheels in the air. One of them was still revolving.

She uttered a sudden cry and rushed to the wreckage. Her son was buried beneath it. She could see an arm. And suddenly she knew the fear of fire.

She ran on to the office buildings. There was an electric siren here for use in case of accidents or of fire. The switch was in Mr. Wigram's office, and she found the window of the office open. A moment later the quiet valley woke to the wailings of the siren's voice.

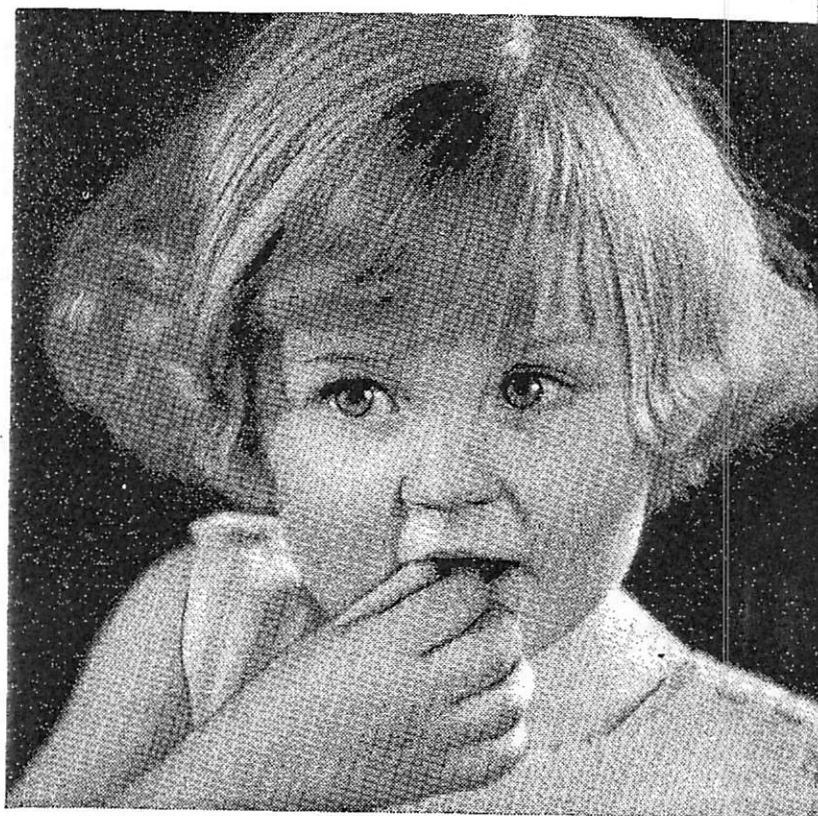
Men came running, half-dressed men, and Wigram was one of the first. They found her kneeling by the wrecked car,

peering under it at that which was
 son.
 "It's Lionel—oh, be quick."
 They raised the car, and Wigram bent
 over the lad. He lay all twisted, and
 at first Wigram thought that he was dead.
 But young Gore was breathing.
 Wigram rose and turned to speak to the
 mother. She had moved away as though
 unable to confront the crisis. She was
 standing ten yards away, her hands grasp-
 ing the iron railings.
 He went and spoke to her.
 "Mrs. Gore, he's breathing."
 She gave him a queer, blind look. Her
 lips moved.
 "Breathing? Oh, then—a doctor—a
 doctor."
 Someone found a cushion, and she sat
 beside that unconscious and broken thing
 that was her son. She was most strangely
 unlike herself. Even her voice had lost
 its confident, hard timbre.
 "Is he never coming?"
 Wigram stood by her.
 "He's on the way."
 "Mr. Wigram, I was wrong."
 Wigram's voice was none too steady.
 "Oh, well, we—all—"
 She repeated those three words.
 "I was wrong."
 Yet, chance was kinder to her than it
 had been to the mother of young Clive,
 though there were times when she would
 ask herself whether annihilation would not
 have been more merciful. The doctors
 managed to save her son, but they gave
 him back to her as a creature who was
 partly paralysed. He would never walk
 again. He would have to live the life of
 an old man who was wheeled to and fro
 in a chair.
 She could never look at him and his
 premature senility without being conscious
 of self-accusation. It was like some pain-
 ful growth that no surgeon's knife could
 deal with, but what she suffered from it
 became part and parcel of her compassion.
 Her egotism had splurged in concrete, and
 upon it her son's youth had been sacrificed.
 She sold Penthill at an almost fabulous
 loss, but in losing it she gained more
 mysteries of self-expression. A syndicate
 bought the track and the aerodrome, but
 Penthill was out of favour with the gods.
 Ten years later it was nothing but a kind
 of strange relic, a derelict concrete shell
 over which the green growth of the valley
 was beginning to lap like water. Its de-
 struction by man-made means would have
 been too wasteful.
 The Vale forgave her. It said—per-
 haps—that she had been a mad egoist, but
 from the news that came to it the Vale
 could gather that she was concrete and
 steel no longer, but flesh and blood. She
 was giving herself to making life some-
 how livable for her son, though whether
 a living death could be called life was
 another matter. Nothing can compensate
 youth for the loss of youth's splendour.
 Into the hands of the few who still read
 poetry, little volumes of verse sometimes
 found their way, the leaves from a young
 man's tree of tragedy.
 One of those little volumes was dedi-
 cated to—"My Mother."

*When next you are in town—
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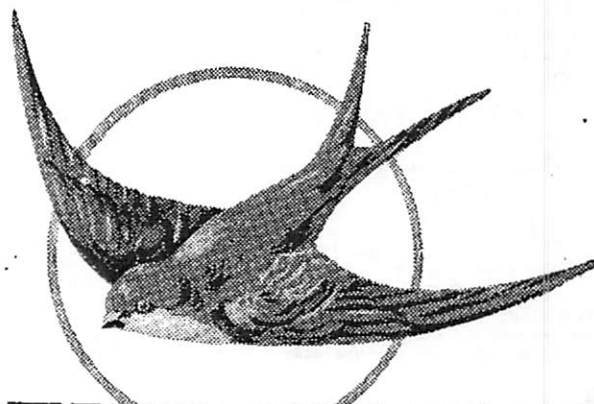
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The Smiling Bronze



By WARWICK DEEPING

A LUCKY MASCOT—LOVE AND ROMANCE

MARTIN CALVERT stepped out into the fog.

So thick was it that he could not see the solid fronts of the houses across the way, but here and there a yellow blur told of a lighted window. He turned to the right along Ticknor Street, keeping close to the area railings till he came to a row of shabby shops. He met no one. A strange silence smothered the street, and the ochre-coloured fog damped down the life of it and stuck in its cold throat.

Calvert had no hat and no overcoat, for he had come out to post a letter at the shop that was half grocer's and half post office. He knew every yard of the Bloomsbury Street, this dismal highway that had begun as the path of hope and adventure, but was now a street of smells, of disillusionment and sighs. He could recognize every smell in it, and these odours seemed to rejoice, and to come forth to revel in the fog. Most of the shops had put up their shutters, but he knew them by their odours: fish, the sawdusty smell of a butcher's, that grating from which emerged a suggestion of cabbage. He hurried. Ticknor Street was more depressing than usual, and its emptiness and raw silence gave him a feeling of coldness at the heart.

The post office was open. Rays of yellow light muffled themselves in the fog, and Calvert stood on the flagstones and looked at the red letter-box with its brassy mouth turned dismally downwards. Was there anything more discouraging than a public letter-box? You thrust hope into the cold jaws, and a few days later the postman would push something through another letter-box, something which fell on the floor with the thud of a dead fish.

Calvert hesitated, holding that long envelope in his hand. He was thinking

how often he had pushed many such envelopes into this brass mouth, and how they had been spewed back at him. Cast your manuscript upon the waters and it shall be returned to you after many days!

"Well, here's the last cartridge," he thought. "I'll try a shot with it."

He slipped the letter into the box and fled.

For there was an element of fear in his going, this flight from a last critical stake hazarded upon the world's table, a dread of the inevitable failure. He cut across the street as though to get away from that hungry, brazen mouth which had swallowed so much of his hope and his ambition.

"Phew, it's cold!"

He was shivering with an inward chilliness. He felt cold with that most terrible of all chills that seizes a man when he has launched a last forlorn effort. Calvert stuffed his hands into his pockets; he remembered that his bed-sitting-room had no fire.

"I'll go to bed," he thought, "it's warm in bed, and one may sleep."

His eyes were afraid, it was as though the fog hid things, dreadful things, sordid brutalities which make a man's skin brittle and prickly with fear. What a horrible city, and what a horrible street! He seemed to see sights that he did not wish to see, the mud flats of the river uncovering their slime, some shapeless thing drifting, figures huddled in seats, a claw of a hand picking at the rubbish in a dustbin, lean cats gnawing at filth! What an abominable business life could be! And there were people who found it good!

A ray of light cut across the path. He paused, turned instinctively, and stood looking into a shop window. His face had a bleached, angry defiance.

"Oh, there you are, damn you!"

It was one of those ramshackle second-

hand shops in which you can buy anything from a rusty Indian dagger to an old tennis racket. It offered you old clothes, boots, odds and ends of furniture, coins, postage stamps, glass, cracked mirrors. In the middle of the window, and throned on a mahogany tea-caddy, sat a little bronze Oriental god, smiling a serene and slightly supercilious smile, and nursing a round stomach with two fat hands. Calvert had got into the habit of glancing at this bronze figure whenever he passed the window. It fascinated him, repelled, provoked him. On one occasion he had entered the shop, and after buying a pair of second-hand brown boots from the dreadful old man who kept it, he had asked the price of the idol.

"You can have it for fifteen shillin's."

The bronze had remained there, snug, serene, and to Calvert a little malignant. It seemed to mock him with its fat complacency and its air of inscrutable calmness. It was amused at life, at the poor, ugly, worried westerners who hurried up and down Ticknor Street, as though the preservation of their paltry existences was a matter of any importance. It stared at Calvert now. It smiled at him; it clasped its comfortable stomach.

"You people never ought to have been born," it seemed to say. "What use are you? What chance have you? What can life be worth to you in this dingy civilization of yours? Oh, yes, I have a secret, the secret of happy living, the secret of the East! I do not scramble for fish-heads and cigar-ends, or slobber myself silly with beer. But I shall not tell any of you my secret. It would be much better for you if you were dead."

Calvert glared at the bronze.

"You smug old copper-coloured beast, I believe you enjoy my bad luck!"

The idol's expression seemed to change. Its smile remained, but it was threatening, scornful.

"Do not abuse what you do not understand. That is not the way to win my secret."

Calvert hurried on, impelled by a vague sense of fear. The fog was in his throat, and a dread of life in his empty belly. He was close to the house where he lodged, and where some sort of stale meal and a bed were waiting for him, though he was in debt to his landlady for two weeks' board and lodging.

All the houses in Ticknor Street were exactly alike, with thin rusty railings, doorsteps, and smutty fanlights and façades. He knew his own house, or thought he did. He took out his latch-

key, opened the door, closed it, saw the usual gas-bracket with a white globe, the same stretch of colourless linoleum. The stairs were the same. He went striding up them, absorbed in his own thoughts, a creature of habit. He passed other gas-jets, as usual they were turned rather low. He came to the brown-coloured door on the top landing. He put his hand to the familiar brass door-knob. He opened the door and stood staring.

For it was not his room. He saw a girl kneeling in front of the fire and holding a frying-pan over the flames, and in it were rashers of bacon which she was turning or moving about with a fork. She was a dark girl, with a straight and pleasant profile, lips slightly compressed, eyes intent under a low forehead. Her dress was a faded green woollen jumper, and on her feet she had pink bedroom-slippers.

"It's all right, Milly," she said, without glancing towards the door. "I've got all I want."

Now Calvert realized that he could close the door and make his escape without her guessing that a strange man had looked in on her. The supposed "Milly"—whoever she might be—had no reason for loitering, nor had Calvert for doing what he did.

"Really, I beg your pardon," he said. "I must have got into the wrong house."

She turned her head sharply. Her eyes surveyed him with an air of cool yet surprised amusement. They were humorous and courageous eyes.

"Seems so!" said she.

His hand remained on the door-knob.

"Very silly of me! I suppose it was the fog. I hope you will forgive me."

She set the frying-pan down in the fender, and turning on her knees, reached for the tea-pot which stood on a small fire-side table.

"Fog? But you have no hat."

"I had gone out to post a letter, and I must have blundered into the wrong house."

"They are alike as two peas."

"And my room is just where your room is."

She held the tea-pot in her hand.

"Oh, what an ass!"

"I know that—"

"I'm referring to myself; I've forgotten the kettle! So we all have our lapses! Yes, I think you live next door."

"No. 37."

"This is 35."

"Thank you. I do hope you'll forgive this absurd blunder."

He knew that he had no excuse for any further loitering in her doorway, and that both common courtesy and common sense urged him to return to No. 37 and the hash and stewed tomatoes and the weak tea that should be waiting for him, but he did not want to go. There was something wholesome and pleasant in the firelight and in this girl kneeling before it. His sense of loneliness and of fear made him gaze longingly at the picture. He thought of his own room as a cold, dark tank.

He was aware of the girl's eyes fixed upon him. They were surprised, questioning, observant. Being quite unembarrassed and unafraid, she was able to appreciate the quality of his hesitation and to feel the dumb misery of his loneliness.

"I say, there's rather a draught. Come in and shut the door."

Her voice was casual and friendly, but it had an immediate effect upon Calvert. He stepped into the room, closed the door, and stood leaning against the wall with the air of a shy and grateful boy who has been admitted into some holy of holies.

"My name's Calvert," he said.

"And mine's Warrender. Do you mind if I go on with my cooking?"

"Do, please! I won't stay a minute. But do you mind if I stay here just for one minute?"

She glanced at him with momentary attentiveness.

"Feeling down?" she asked.

He opened his eyes wide.

"How did you know that?"

"Felt it, I suppose. I'm not a mollusc. Why not sit down?"

"May I?"

"I think I can boast of one sound chair."

Calvert sat down rather apologetically, while she knelt and watched the kettle and kept the rashers moving in the frying-pan. She was about his own age, thirty or so, but she had retained her air of girlishness, and she was the mistress of a happy audacity, the very virtue that he lacked.

"Queer place—London!" she said.

"More than queer."

"Horrible—sometimes—what? You've got London on your nerves to-night."

"You are very quick."

"Oh, I know the feeling! I've had so many failures. And you?"

"Yes, I'm a failure all right!"

"Sure?"

"Well, I've fired my last cartridge."

"Nonsense! You only do that when you die."

The kettle was boiling and she filled the tea-pot, seeming calmly intent on the job in hand.

"Stay and have some tea."

"Really, you are too—I couldn't—"

"Why not? I can manage it. I'm pretty well stony, and I suppose you are, too. Let's compare notes."

His eyes brightened to the firelight.

"If I might sit here while you have your tea."

"I hate being watched when I eat."

"Then I'd better clear out."

"No, do the sensible thing. You'll find another plate and things in that cupboard. I always camp on the hearth-rug."

Their sharing of her meal and their exchange of confidences completed Calvert's blundering and inadvertent introduction of himself, and by the time they had come to the cigarettes he was talking to her with a self-astonished frankness. He had written about women in his unpublished books and tales, but without much subtlety and on somewhat conventional lines. In none of his stories had he ever imagined a strange man walking into a girl's room, sharing her tea, and telling her all his troubles. Such things did not happen, or, if they happened, it would be difficult to make them seem convincing. Yet the present situation did convince him, just because Sybil Warrender seemed to know neither fear nor prejudice.

"The verdict is," she said, sitting on her heels, "that we are failures."

His eyes glanced sideways at her.

"I shouldn't call you a failure!"

"My dear Mr. Calvert, my ambition was to write plays, and I have written plays, quite good plays, but they have never got on the boards. Meanwhile, for bread and butter, I have been a typist, a saleswoman, a mannequin, a waitress, the manageress of a tea-shop. I never stuck to any of them, because they were parts, bits of life, and one shouldn't stand still. At the present moment I am out of a job, for the tea-shop went bust, and I am living on my savings and writing a jolly fine play."

"I don't call that the career of a failure. Anyhow, you have kept your smile."

"And you haven't."

"No, that's true. I snarl."

"Don't snarl; it doesn't help. Why, in two or three days an editor may be

chatting over that thing you posted to-night, and be asking for more."

"Oh, perhaps! I'm a sceptic."

"Then you'll never do anything."

"But I believe in luck, and mine is bad."

"Change it."

"How?"

"By persuading yourself that it's going to change. It doesn't matter how you do it. Go and buy the little bronze god in old Goldstein's shop."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"So you have noticed that, too?"

"I notice a good many things, and I rather like the look of that old joss."

"You would hardly believe it, but I stopped and cursed that thing just before I blundered in here."

"Did you?" She was interested.

"But you shouldn't be rude to such idols. Why were you rude?"

"I always feel that the thing is mocking me. Have you noticed its smile? Super-cilious."

"No, wisely amused, secret."

"It doesn't suggest that to me."

"Perhaps that is your fault. If you smiled at the old gentleman you might see him as I do."

She stared at the fire for a moment, and then laughed and flung her cigarette end into the flames.

"Say, here's an idea! Supposing we buy the old gentleman, go shares in him, and see if he changes our luck."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious. Goldstein wanted twelve shillings for it."

"He asked me fifteen."

"So you did once think——?"

"Yes. I should have chucked it into the river."

"But that's wrong, that's the wrong spirit. Now, how much can you raise?"

He felt in his trouser pockets, and counted the money.

"Four and tenpence. I'm short of a half share by one and twopence."

"I'll supply the difference."

"But that won't be fair."

"You can pay me one and twopence when your first tale is accepted. But, say, let's go out now and buy the thing."

"Goldstein's will be shut."

"No. He shuts all sorts of hours. Come along. Are you game?"

"I'll come," he said.

So they went out together into the fog, and finding Mr. Goldstein's shop still open, prepared to do business with him. Sybil Warrender played the active part. She confided to Mr. Goldstein that she

wanted an ornament for her mantelpiece, and after considering a cracked Dresden figure and an imitation Wedgwood vase, she turned her attention casually to the bronze.

"Oh, that funny old thing there! What do you think of it, Mr. Calvert?"

Martin showed no enthusiasm.

"Much better have the vase."

"I don't know. How much is the little god?"

"Fifteen shillings."

"You said twelve before, Mr. Goldstein."

"If I did say twelve it was a mistake."

In the end they bought the bronze for thirteen shillings and sixpence, and carried it back to Sybil Warrender's room. She set it on the mantelpiece, stroked it, lit a cigarette and puffed smoke gently into its inscrutable face, her red lips quite close to its polished surface.

"Be good to us, dear master!"

And then they fell to arguing as to which of them should keep it for the first day.

"I better have it first," said Calvert, "for if the luck is bad it had better fall on me."

"No, I don't look on it in that way. I think he ought to begin on my mantelpiece. You see, he and I have been friends longer than you have."

"That's true."

"Come and fetch him to-morrow evening for your turn."

"May I?"

"Well, we are partners in this little gamble. Good night."

Calvert went back to his own room, feeling that nothing but a wall divided them, and that Sybil Warrender was of much more importance to him than a whole crate-load of bronze gods. She had stimulated him, and perhaps she had made him feel faintly ashamed, though in the interplay of temperaments it was a question of the woman giving the man what he lacked.

When Calvert pulled up his blind next morning he saw that the fog had gone, and that the sun was shining upon frosted roofs and upon plumes of smoke that ascended towards a pale blue sky. Even London chimney-pots looked a little less forbidding, and Calvert was conscious of new hope stirring in him.

"A fool's paradise!" he thought, as he sluiced cold water over his head. "She was right. Get your bread and butter from some plain job, and don't bleed your art by trying to live on it before it has had a chance to grow. I'll



In the end they bought the bronze for thirteen shillings and sixpence

try and get a job, and keep my art for the evenings and Sundays."

He stood at the window and towelled his head.

"Breathing space. That's it. To snatch a little leisure from life, time to do a thing well, without base scuffling. I feel that I can do it. And a man ought to learn to smile."

He spent the day looking for a job, after running through the advertisements in a daily paper, but though he consumed much shoe leather and lunched on a glass of milk and two slices of bread and butter, he was quite unsuccessful in obtaining any work. He smiled over it; he made himself smile over it. After each rebuff he reminded himself of Sybil Warrender and the bronze god.

"If I only had an odd hundred pounds," he thought, "just to get square with life, and time to look round! Living like a starved cat means that you feel and look like one. I want a new suit of clothes; I want to pay the old lady who feeds me. I should feel that I had got my head up, and that I was something of a man."

At eight o'clock he rang the bell of No. 35, not entering the house as he had entered it the previous night, though his latch-key fitted both locks.

"Is Miss Warrender in?"

The maid appeared to expect him, and she took the trouble to toil up four flights of stairs as though she were performing a labour of love.

"A gentleman to see you, miss."

"Ask him to come in, Milly."

Calvert found her sitting at her table, with her elbows resting on it and her hands supporting her chin, while she blew soft puffs of smoke at the little god who was enthroned on a biscuit tin in the middle of the table. She had a sleek, happy look, and it seemed to Calvert that the little bronze figure shone with an air of smiling beneficence. He saw no superciliousness in the idol's smile. It was wise and secret, vaguely mischievous.

She glanced up at Calvert.

"Had any luck?"

He went and stood by the fire.

"Yes and no."

He smiled, and her eyes smiled back.

"I see, but that is a good beginning. Well, you have not asked me——"

"Have you had any luck?"

"I think so. I have put the best bit of work on paper—the best I had done—ever. And Mr. Bronze and I have been loving each other. He has a secret; I'm sure of it. Look at his smile."

Indeed, the bronze's face did seem to betray a benignant slyness, as though he had a secret and was challenging them to guess it.

"He wants—us—to guess it," said the girl.

She threw her cigarette end into the fire, and picking up the bronze, held it in the hollow of her two upturned hands, and as she did so Calvert was aware of a little puckered frown on her forehead. She looked puzzled by some suggestion; she seemed to be considering it. He saw her move her hands up and down as though she were trying the weight and the balance of the figure.

"That is what struck me before. Try. I'll tell you my impression."

He took the figure from her and held it as she had held it.

"It seems heavy."

"Ah, you feel that too!"

"Yes, heavier, somehow, than one would expect."

Their eyes met.

"Supposing," she said, "supposing there were something inside it."

"You mean?"

"Well, I remember a man who was keen on these things telling me that the Chinese sometimes hid valuables inside them."

Calvert carried the figure to the light, and turning it over, examined the base, the girl looking over his shoulder. There was an oval depression in the centre of the base, but the metal looked solid, and when Calvert struck it with his knuckles there was no suggestion of hollowness.

"Seems solid enough."

"But it might be——"

"Hollow?"

"Yes."

"Let's try. By Jove, let's try."

She took the bronze from him, and holding it on her palms, spoke to it with an air of endearing solemnity.

"Is the thought sacrilegious, smiling one? Will you be angry with us if we try to find out if you have a secret?"

She looked steadily at the bronze.

"See, he approves! I'm sure he approves. He wants us to try. But how?"

Calvert stood thinking.

"A metal drill. That's it! I know an old fellow round the corner whose hobby

is metal-work. He used to be with us next door, but someone complained of his tapping and filing, and he tried another house. Suppose I go and borrow a drill?"

"The very thing!" she said.

Calvert was back again in half an hour.

"I've got it."

"Good! But I don't suppose we shall find anything, you know."

"Of course not," he said.

But they were excited, while pretending to be sceptical and casually calm; and Sybil Warrender impressed a solemn kiss upon the bronze's head before the operation upon him was commenced. She placed a red cushion on the edge of the table, set the bronze upon it, lying upon his back, and prepared to steady the figure with her hands. Calvert was ready with the hand-drill.

"I wonder!" he said.

They looked into each other's eyes.

"Do you expect to find anything?"

"No."

"Nor do I. We are a couple of credulous children playing a game."

"Well, let us play it, anyway. After all, to play the game is the thing."

They set to work, Calvert starting the point of the drill in the centre of the oval depression in the middle of the figure's base. The girl held it steady. The grinding whirr of the metal point brought a trickle of powdered bronze on to the red of the cushion, and a minute heap of it collected there. The girl watched it. Now and then they exchanged a few words, but for the most part they were silent.

The drill nosed its way into the bronze as Calvert turned the wheel. It had penetrated for half an inch or so when Calvert suddenly stopped turning. His eyes puzzled. They met Sybil Warrender's eyes.

"What's the matter?"

"The thing has a different feel."

"How?"

"As though I had got into something softer than bronze; not so much resistance."

She caught her breath, and her face showed a heightened colour.

"Perhaps the bronze is only a shell, and they filled the inside with lead. Wait—draw out the drill."

He did so, and with it came a little flick of some lighter coloured substance. The point of the drill itself was marked with it.

They looked at each other.

"What is it?"

"It looks like—like gold."

She picked up the bronze and stared at his smiling face.

"Your secret! You have a secret! Oh, partner, what are we going to find?"

It took them till midnight to drill away a portion of the base of the bronze, working with great care, so as not to damage that something which they knew to be inside. And at last they had it. The thing slid out and lay upon the red cushion, a little yellow cylinder, whose surface was carved with the winding sinuosities of a dragon. They stood and stared at it.

"I suppose it is gold?"

"It must be. Would they trouble to—?"

"No, but what is inside? Try."

"No, you!"

She picked up the cylinder, and found that the top of it unscrewed. The cap came away. She held the body of the cylinder over the cushion and inverted it as though she were emptying a glass. A score or so of green and glittering things fell down upon the red cushion.

"Emeralds!"

She spoke in a whisper.

"Partner, you'll be able to pay me that one and twopence!"

"One and elevenpence," he corrected her.

And then he stood very still.

"My god! A breathing space, a chance to get square to start again!"

"Oh, more than that! Much more. Don't you see—that this is symbolical?"

"I see dozens of things," he said, looking into her eyes.

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Transfiguration

By
WARWICK DEEPING



HE drove a car. It was her own car, but not yet completely paid for, and she drove it for hire.

Necessity had persuaded her to do this—necessity, a derelict sister, and her own spirit of independence. She was a gentlewoman, and very much one of the new poor.

She confessed to herself afterwards that she had not realized life—the life of a girl with a flaming head of hair plying for hire in a great city, and she allowed that she had entered on it with too much of the spirit of adventure. The adventure was there, but it was apt to be sordid and sinister.

She was independent.

"I can look after myself. Don't worry."

Her first discovery was that if she did not look after herself no one else would do it for her. She was fair game. She thought that she knew men, only to be convinced that what she knew about them needed emphasizing.

Hailed one night somewhere in the neighbourhood of Knightsbridge, she drew up at the *porte cochère* of a private hotel and picked up a large man in evening dress. He was smoking; his hat was at an angle; his shirt-front bulged; he exuded male prosperity. He gave her an address in Kensington, and she drove off. A minute later she heard a knock on the glass of the front window and she pulled up.

He got out.

"Awfully stuffy to-night. Do you think I could sit outside with you?"

Her car was not an ordinary taxi; it had a seat beside the driver.

"Just as you please," she said, casual and innocent.

He laboured in beside her, and she

drove on. He became conversational, and she answered him with casual monosyllables, intent on handling her car.

"What do you do this for?"

There was something brutal yet ingratiating in his voice.

"Because I like it."

He laughed.

"What, with hair like that? I say, it is nice and fresh here. You can take me out as far as Richmond and back, what?"

"It is merely a question of money," she said.

She realized afterwards that the materialism of her answer may have misled him, but when she found his arm round her she swept the car in to the kerb and looked him full in the face.

"Get out!"

She was furious. He got out; he tried to make a vulgar jest of it, and, inserting a fat hand into a pocket, dabbed a pound note down on the seat.

"Buy yourself a box of chocolates."

She picked up the note between a finger and thumb, holding it by one corner, and she dropped it in the gutter and drove off.

After that she did some serious thinking. She loved her hair, and she had a long interview with herself in her mirror.

"I had better get it bobbed," she reflected.

But the woman in her did not want it bobbed, and her natural prejudice was reinforced by the thought that a bobbed head might be more flaunting and provocative than a sleek one.

"I'll get one of those floppy caps and bundle it all inside."

She did.

Yet that was only the beginning. She had further trouble with the adventure spirit in the male, and when the garage foreman began to be insolently and in-

timately attentive, she took her car elsewhere and bought stiff collars. She knew that the men in the garage had called her "Glory," and "Carrots," and "Fire-fly," but mere nicknames had not troubled her. The plainer sorts of men had shown her the cheerful kind of chivalry one gets from policemen, bus conductors and guards.

The transfiguration matured, for she found an inevitableness in it, relief, security. There were times when her feminine independence was a thing of bitterness and of pain, a wound, a burden, a cross, for she was no neuter bee, and sometimes she longed for that protection which the modern woman is supposed to despise. But she had to choose.

"If I'm to be independent," she reflected, "I had better look it. Oh, these fools and cads!"

She became plain, almost aggressively plain. Her hair was dragged back and hidden under her cap; she wore mannish clothes; her figure disappeared; she threw her feet about when she walked, or stood with them wide apart. She did not bother about her skin. And the curious part of it all was that she developed the psychology of the plain woman. The inside of her grew plain. It ceased to flush with any instinct for romance.

An old friend, met by appointment at Paddington one afternoon, almost failed to recognize her.

"Mary! But—my dear girl!"

Mary Williams laughed.

"Does my professional appearance shock you?"

"But what have you done with your beautiful hair?"

"Hidden it. It seemed to be too much like a musical comedy poster, especially in Piccadilly."

Later, at tea in the Williams workman's flat, she explained her philosophy to a woman who was happily married.

"I realized that I had to desex myself, you know. It saved such a lot of trouble. Men don't bother to look at me now."

"Don't you want them to look at you?"

Mary Williams' face became transiently sad.

"Well, not the sort of man who thinks that a woman in my position is fair game. I suppose I am fair game, but the

idiots never seem to realize that a woman may find such stuff very boring. Do you know what astonishes me, Norah?"

"What?"

"The preposterous complacency of the ordinary, common middle-class male."

"Oh, my dear, they are not all like that."

"I suppose not. But, really, it would be refreshing to meet the exception. I got so tired of ordinary taxi work that now I do as much private work as possible. I have quite a circle of nice old ladies and old boys, and several of the hotels have been very decent to me."

"Have you paid for the car yet?"

"Not quite, but I am making a living, and I am able to help Pauline."

In the June of that year a certain Richard Lancaster, home from India on leave, and staying at the Carrington Hotel, asked the head porter to arrange the hiring of a car for him.

"I want it for the day, to go to Horsham and back."

"Would you object to a lady driver, sir?"

"Not in the least, so long as she can drive."

"She is quite first class, sir, and she drives her own car."

At nine o'clock on a June morning, Mary Williams and her car were waiting outside the Carrington Hotel. She was examining a map when Lancaster came out, and she was not aware of him until she heard his voice.

"Good morning. Are we ready?"

He had a pleasant voice, and the first thing she noticed about him was that he raised his hat to her. In age he was about forty; he was dark; he had the mouth of a sailor, but his eyes were more alive than the eyes of most sailor men. Ten years ago these eyes had been somewhat scornful and impatient, but they had grown more kind, more humanly mischievous.

She was not conscious of it, but her face had flushed very slightly.

"I suppose you would like the car open? It is a coupé, you know."

"Please."

"We are going to Horsham?"

"Yes. I am due to lunch there."

"Do you want me to take any particular road?"

"No. I leave it to you."

They set off. She took the Epsom, Leatherhead, Dorking road, and she saw no more of him till they were near Ashted, when a front tyre punctured.

She quickly pulled in to the side of the road.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shan't be five minutes."

He got out, and while she was extracting the jack from the locker, he unhitched the spare wheel for her. He did it as a matter of course, to save time, not because she was a woman. She felt that instantly, this purely impersonal courtesy of his, his completely practical attitude towards her as an individual doing her job.

She was grateful to him, for in life we are grateful for absurdly small things. And yet, too, she was not grateful.

"That's that."

They were off again, but on Holmwood Common a back tyre blew up with a noise like a pistol shot. She was annoyed; her professional pride was vexed; she was always very particular about the condition of her tyres.

"Drat!" she said; "I'm most awfully sorry. I shall have to put in a new tube."

"That's all right," he answered.

"I hate having punctures. It looks so inefficient."

"Your tyres are in good condition."

"Yes. I'm rather particular about that."

"I'm afraid I must be a Jonah."

He laughed. He took off his coat and prepared to help her, and a quick glance of hers observed his face. It showed no irritation, no anxiety as to the future and his lunch at Horsham, and it struck her that his good temper was natural, part of his philosophy. Many bad-tempered men can appear triumphant and impressive saints when there is a woman—a new woman—in the case. His philosophy smiled both at the incident and the woman; it put life at its ease, not from any sex motive, but out of wholesome kindness.

They tackled the job together. He left her in authority, but his hands were quick and clever to help. She liked him; she liked his attitude towards life, the sense of comradeship he gave her. There was a moment when she was attacked by a sudden feminine impulse; she would have liked to have pulled off that sleepy

brown cap and let her hair show itself. But she didn't.

They had no more trouble, and it was half-past twelve when Mary turned her car into the gate of a biggish house a mile or so on the other side of Horsham. She drove up the avenue to the house, dropped him at the door, and putting in the reverse, began to back towards the stables.

"Miss Williams!"

He came after her.

"What about lunch?"

"Oh, I always bring sandwiches," she said.

"We'll see about that," he answered with a smile.

A quarter of an hour later she was giving the engine some oil when a big woman with grey hair and merry dark eyes came in search of her.

"Miss Williams, you must have lunch with us. I insist."

Mary raised her head, and her face had a faint flush.

"It is very good of you. I should like to."

"That's right. Perhaps you would like a wash. Mr. Lancaster tells me you had such bad luck coming down from town."

"It is all in the day's work," said Mary.

She was taken to a pleasant little bedroom overlooking a Dutch garden, and here she had a struggle with that same feminine impulse, the desire to remove that floppy cap; but she resisted it, almost with passion.

"Don't be an ass!" she said to herself.

"Yes, but he is the first sahib you have met for a very long time," the more feminine part of her retorted.

"Shut up; it isn't done," said her workaday self; "besides, your hair is as flat as treacle."

She kept on that brown cap, and went down to lunch in it. The room was pleasant—shabbily and richly pleasant—and the people were not of the new age. She felt like a cat on a velvet cushion; she was hungry; she sat opposite Lancaster; he talked to her; he even teased her a little. The more she looked at him, and the more she felt the man in him, the more she liked him. For once she let herself escape from the repression of her material world.

Going into the drawing-room after-

wards she happened to see herself in a glass. It was a shock to her.

"Heavens, what a fright!"

The experience sobered her, and presently she made some excuse of having to attend to her car, and so escaped to the steadying atmosphere of her working self. Lancaster had said that they would drive back after tea, and she took the car into Horsham, and managed to pick up a new tyre at a garage.

"No profit in to-day's job," she reflected.

She had tea in Horsham, and called for him at five o'clock, explaining her absence by parading her quest of a spare tyre.

"I'm afraid the other is finished. We must have run over glass or something."

"Look here," he said, "you must let me have a share in that."

"Nonsense. That's part of my business."

She looked unpersuadable, and he did not press the point.

They reached the "Carrington" at half-past seven. He stood with his hat in his hand, and asked her if she would drive him again should he need a car.

"Certainly," she said.

They smiled at each other and parted, and the feminine part of Mary Williams had the last word.

"What a pity you have to look such a dodd!"

Lancaster had gone up to change for dinner.

"A nice girl—that!" he reflected. "But—poor soul!—how plain!"

She drove him once again during June, and he sat in the back seat, tactfully detached from her; but she could not help wishing that something had tempted him to take that seat beside her. She wondered whether the Mary Williams of a year ago would have made it seem worth his while to sit there. Other men had thought so, but then, he was different from other men.

At the end of the month she had a letter from an old friend of hers, Ida Willoughby, whose husband owned Oxenham Court near Henley.

"DEAR MARY,—Can you give up earning your living for a few days, and spend Henley week with us? Do come. We are having a friendly little house-party, and an old pal of Ted's who is home

from India will be with us. I would ask Pauline to come too, but I know that she is not up to it. You must come.—Yours affectionately,

"IDA."

Mary decided to go. She was feeling rather ragged and tired, and she had had no holiday for a year, and she knew that Ida Willoughby had not asked her in the spirit in which she might have asked a poor relation out of pity. Mary would not tolerate pity. And yet there were times when she had an almost overmastering desire to be spoilt and petted, but most plain women are denied that.

"Shall I be smart for once," she wondered, "or stay as I am?"

She had not decided this question when one of the page-boys from the "Carrington" left a note from Lancaster at her flat.

The coincidence was remarkable. It appeared from this formal little note of his that he was going to stay at Oxenham Court for Henley week, and that he had decided to travel by car. He had told her that he detested trains. Obviously, he was Ted Willoughby's friend home from India. He asked her to let him know whether she could drive him to Oxenham on the afternoon of July 4th.

She thought it over.

"Why not?" she decided. "I was going down myself in the old bus, anyway."

She answered his note, and agreed to drive him to Oxenham Court, but she did not tell him that she too was a friend of the Willoughbys, and that he would have her as a fellow guest. The reservation was instinctive, and it adumbrated the shadowy edge of a decision moving across the face of the problem of her appearance. She was piqued by it. She gave way to the spirit of adventure. Her choice was inspired by curiosity, cynicism, a sense of humour, but at the back of all her worldly wisdom stood the woman.

"I wonder," she thought, "I wonder!"

She laughed over the developing situation. She wrote to Ida Willoughby and explained the humour of the thing, pointing out the possible jest in it, though she knew that she did not wish it to be a jest. "Pretend you don't know me when we arrive. Keep it up till dinner-time. I'll disappear till dinner, and then we

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will see whether he recognizes me. Introduce me as Miss Jones!"

Ida Willoughby wrote back with a happy, laughing note in her letter: "Great! What a jest! I have had to take Ted into the secret, and he's quite keen. I wonder what you think of Dick Lancaster? Ted says that he is one of the few great gentlemen left alive."

Mary was inclined to agree with Ted. She bought two new frocks and three new hats, a pair of dancing-shoes, a white river coat, a sun-shade, and three pairs of silk stockings. On July 3rd she went and had her hair washed and waved, but on July 4th it was hidden under that atrocious brown cap. She drove to the "Carrington" with two suit-cases wrapped in canvas lashed to the luggage grid, and looking her stiff, workaday and usual self. She explained the luggage on the grid by saying that it belonged to a friend who was going to Henley, and that she had agreed to leave it at one of the local inns.

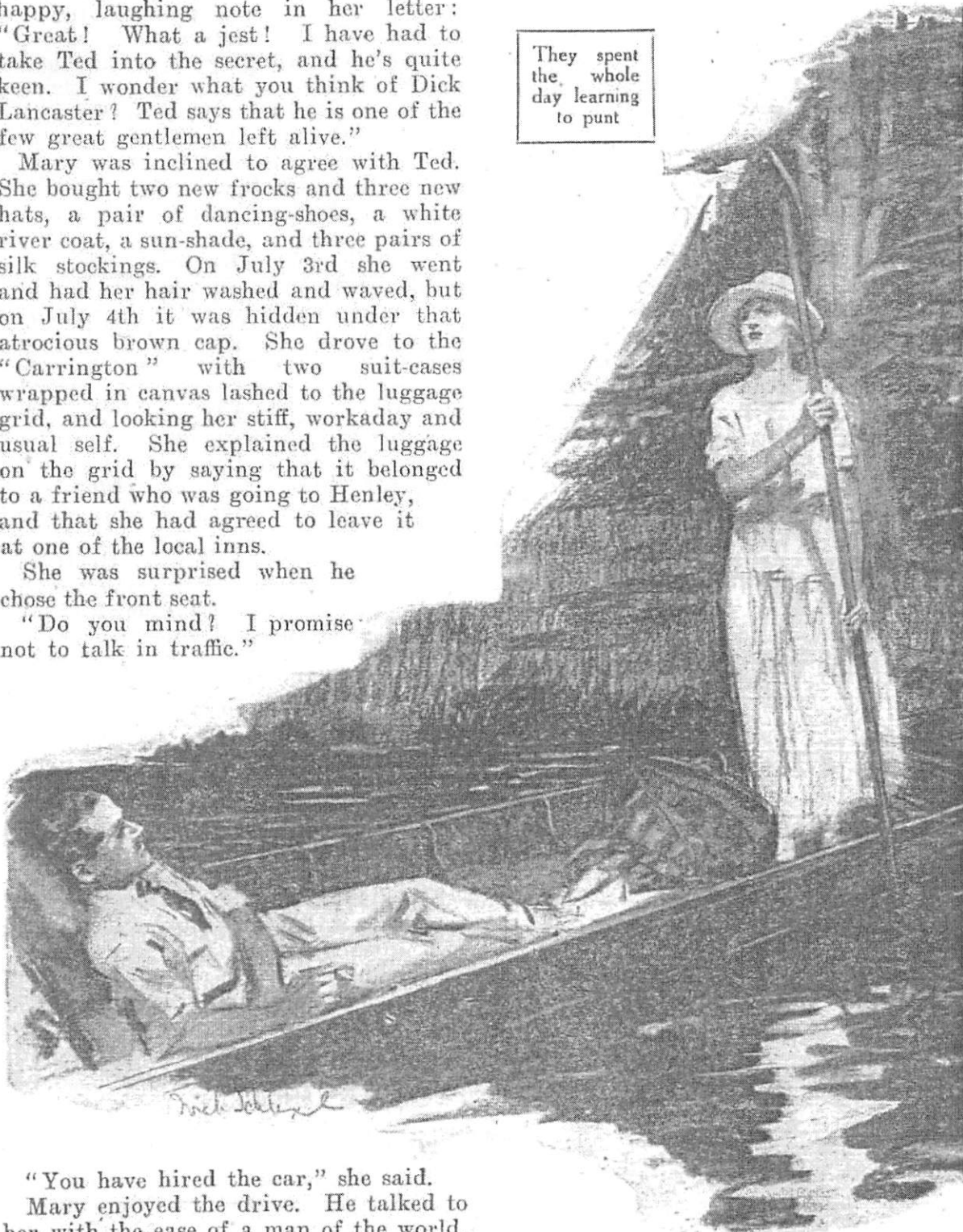
She was surprised when he chose the front seat.

"Do you mind? I promise not to talk in traffic."

the idea of an office. It is not a bad life."

"That must depend on one's pluck," he said.

They spent
the whole
day learning
to punt



"You have hired the car," she said.

Mary enjoyed the drive. He talked to her with the ease of a man of the world. He appeared interested in her and her way of making a living, but not, she thought, for any sentimental reason. He treated her as a sport. And she was quite frank with him.

"I had to do something, and I loathed

She knew Oxenham Court well, and as she pulled the car up she was aware of Ted Willoughby's eyeglass and sleek head and Ida's brown-eyed smile. They welcomed Lancaster as an old friend, and were very successful in ignoring her.

Lancaster introduced her to them.

"Miss Williams. You must make her stay to tea."

She blushed a little, laughed, and excused herself.

"No, thanks so much. I'll be getting back. I can get tea on the way home."

A manservant had removed Lancaster's luggage, and was proceeding to attack the suit-cases on the grid.

"No, not that," she said hurriedly. "I hope you will have good weather. Good-bye!"

She drove off towards the gate, pulled up, looked back and, seeing that Lancaster had been taken into the house, she turned the car up the road leading to the stables. A coach-house showed empty, and she ran the car in. She was climbing out when Ted appeared to assist in the conspiracy.

"What a jest! I've come round to smuggle in your luggage."

"It's on the grid."

"Right ho! We'll lock these doors and keep the key. Ida has Lancaster safe in the drawing-room. We shall have to get in the back way."

He was enjoying the situation, and with a suit-case in each hand he led her round to the back of the house and up the back stairs.

"Dirty work!" he laughed.

She found herself in a room looking over the meadows towards the river. She locked the door, and sitting down at the window she had a moment's panic. She found that her impulses were more deeply involved than she had thought, and she was afraid of being hurt, innocently hurt by a man and a jest.

"I have got to go through with it," she thought; "I started it."

Someone knocked at the door. She opened it and found Ida with a tea-tray and an armful of magazines.

"The plot thickens!" she laughed. "You look tired, dear."

"I'm-going to rest."

"Is there anything you want?"

"No, thanks, dear. What time is dinner?"

"A quarter to eight."

"Miss Jones will be ready."

She had tea on the sofa by the open window, with the green landscape to tranquillize her, and after tea she felt better.

"What's in a frock!" she reflected. "No, I am not going to be cynical."

Mary took an hour to dress for dinner. Her amber-red hair showed glossy waves, and her face—which an hour ago had looked colourless and dead—now shone with a warm pallor. She had chosen a soft green dress, and with it she wore green stockings, silver shoes, and a necklace of green jade beads. She looked at herself in the long mirror, and saw a different woman.

The Willoughbys, Lancaster, and two or three of the house-party were sitting in the loggia when Mary went downstairs. As he stepped through the French window she was conscious of a moment's curiosity and excitement. She would know at once by the way he looked at her—what every woman knows.

"Oh, come along, Phyllis. I hope you are rested. Dick, I want to introduce you to Miss Jones. Mr. Lancaster—Miss Jones."

He bowed. He was smiling. His smile began by being appreciative and unsuspecting, and ended by being puzzled. At the first glance he simply had not recognized her.

She sat down, but he remained standing. His eyes had grown serious, and he looked down at her with an attentive, sidelong interest. Then he smiled.

"This is my first Henley," he said. "And you?"

She hesitated. She had forgotten that her voice would betray her.

"Oh, I have been here before!"

He glanced at the Willoughbys and there was a laughing accusation in the look. He sat down beside Mary.

"Caught, fairly caught! Will one of you wicked people tell me whether the name is Jones or Williams?"

There was a little burst of laughter.

"I'm not Welsh, but I'm Williams!"

"Dick, you were caught! I was watching you."

"And such an observant fellow too!"

"What is the forfeit?" he asked.

"You will have to take Mary in to dinner."

"If you call that a penalty," he said, "I'll go on being penalized, thank you!"

Henley has a fondness for being very English in its weather, but this year there was no rain. The Willoughbys had the happy knack of entertaining people with-

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out entertaining them; and Ida, gently suggestive, would persuade her guests to do the very thing she felt that they wanted to do. She was never the autocrat—crowding all her people into one punt and inflicting the worst forms of social communism upon them.

"There are the two punts, the skiff, and the Canadian canoe," she would announce at breakfast. "Please sort yourselves. Lunch will be with the car in the paddock."

Her system worked pleasantly. It allowed the men a certain human latitude and the right of selection.

"I have not the faintest idea how to handle a punt," said Lancaster to Mary after breakfast. "But would you assist me?"

"I know no more about punts than you do."

"Then we shall start level."

They spent the day learning to punt.

Two days later he was looking at her with something more than playfulness in his eyes.

"I say, I am being disgracefully selfish, but may I repeat yesterday?"

"If you wish it," she said.

"Thank you!"

On the last day, after dinner, they wandered out into the garden. He talked to her about Cashmir and his life there, and she knew that he had a reason for talking to her about Cashmir. Their intimacy had grown very subtle and delightful; she had felt his gradual approach, and yet it had filled her with exquisite incredulity.

Dusk was falling. She was conscious of an imminent crisis.

"Mary," he said, "I want to ask you something. May I?"

"You may."

"Why have you been so brutal to yourself?"

It was unexpected, but she liked his unexpectedness; it was refreshing.

"Because, my friend, of the foolish brute in man."

"In me?" he asked.

"No," she said; "no, not in you."



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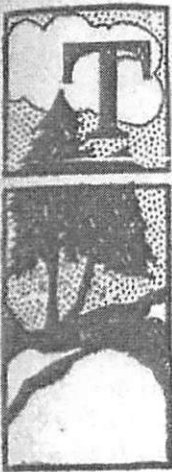
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Rescue

By Warwick Deeping

(Author of *Sorrell & Son*)

"An hour ago he might have despised her, but now there was something of awe in his awareness of her womanhood."



HEY had been overtaken by darkness, but that did not matter to the man and the girl in the bow of the punt, and it was a relief to the girl who sat steering. As the green gloom had deepened and changed to a grey and black she had seen those other two less distinctly, her sister's red head on the purple cushion and so near to the man's shoulder. It was a relief to her to see them less distinctly. She watched the dim curves of the river. It was a May evening, an evening suddenly warm and still after a wet and blustering fortnight. The river was high and running fast; they had paddled up against the stream and were drifting back to Marley.

"You steer, Joan."

Joan steered. That was all that she was there for, and they would have been happier without her. Her sister's drawling and casual voice had thrust her away into a little world apart, a woman's most bitter world. "You steer, Joan." Yes, they left her to handle the paddle, while they lay there close together on the cushions—lovers.

The sunset had died behind her, the green world had been full of the singing of birds. "Joy, joy, spring is here, spring is here"—"He loves me, he loves me." She felt cold as the running water while her sister's head grew dim on the cushion.

"Six months ago," she thought, "and it was I who mattered to him."

It had seemed so. She had had every excuse for thinking that Lawrence Hurst had cared, though like most men of the day he was in no hurry; he wanted to play. And then Maisie had come home, with her red head, and those eyes strangely dark in the glowing pallor of her face, and he had flown like a moth at a candle.

"You steer, Joan."

Yes, she felt bitter and rather desolate. She had cared too much, and she cared still. She was a silent girl, sensitive, dark, reserved, with a pride that could burn with secret shame. What fools men were! She knew her Maisie as sister knows sister. There was no depth in Maisie; she gave you a false impression of softness and of innocence, and she was hard, and more than hard. Joan knew. She had grown up with her younger sister's egotism, its flaming spitefulnesses, and grabbing of dolls and toys.

"I want it—it's mine."

Always that had been Maisie's cry. She had screamed and fought and grabbed, and been given in to. "Dear Maisie is so passionate." And now she had grabbed Lawrie Hurst, just because he had seemed to belong to her sister.

The darkness on the river deepened, and with it something darkened in Joan Meynell's soul. How silent those two were! She crouched, holding the paddle, listening to the sound of the water, and

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trying not to hear any other sound.

"Aren't you going to take a turn, you two?"

She heard Maisie's laugh.

"Poor old Jo! Tired?"

"Not a bit. I thought you might be tired of slacking."

"O, we're not tired, Lawrie, are we?"

The dark girl recovered her silence. She sat rigid, looking straight ahead down the river, and her breath came through pinched nostrils. What humiliation! To be laughed at, pushed aside! Poor old Jo! A spasm of fierceness stirred in her—but feeling the sharp edge of it, she turned it against herself. Shameful creature, effaced by her sister, jealous, miserable, and unable to throw her misery aside! Her fierceness grew into a sort of desperation, rage against herself, a wild desire to do some desperate thing, to put an end to her own sufferings. Why did she care so bitterly? In these days who cared?—in this age of play.

It seemed to grow more dark. She could not see the banks, but only the gleam of the water. She was watching for the lights of Marley when suddenly there struck across a dim patch of light in the sky a gaunt black something. Was it the moon coming up behind a cloud? And what was that black thing towering up? Heavens! she had forgotten! She was looking at one of the timber piers of the new bridge that was being built here, the casing of one of the new huge concrete pillars. The water would be swirling round it with a little edge of foam. She would have to be careful. There were four of these columns of timber with the river running darkly between them. She would have to keep the punt very straight on its course.

Then, suddenly, that impulse came to her out of the darkness of the river and the dark despondency of her inward self. To do something desperate, violent, final, to bring

reality into the hearts of those two triflers! She gripped the paddle, she closed her eyes. She saw it all so distinctly. They were both good swimmers, those other two—while fifty yards was her own limit. What did it matter? She would just let herself sink and forget.

She opened her eyes, she saw one of the dark piers looming up. Yes, it would be so easy. She pressed the paddle against the stream, and felt the punt swing round broadside to the current. It seemed to sweep with amazing suddenness against the bulk of the pier.

She uttered a cry.

"Look out—the bridge!"

It was over in an instant. The punt, swept broadside against the pier, quivered, heeled over, and seemed pressed down as by a great hand. Water poured in. She was on her knees when the punt filled and sank, slipping away from under her. Dimly she had been aware of Hurst starting up and reaching for the pole.

"By God!—look out—Maisie——"

She had dropped the paddle. She was floating under the dark superstructure of the bridge, the water was over her face! Darkness, a choking feeling; she struggled, struck out, and came to the surface. Something touched her.

"Maisie!"

She felt a spasm of pain. He was swimming beside her; she ceased to move and let herself be submerged, and felt a hand seize her hair. It hurt, but she clasped a desperate silence; she heard his voice.

"Don't struggle, dear."

She was conscious of exultation and of shame, and of a sense of surrender. He was saving her, and he thought that he was saving her sister. Let him think it. Maisie was a strong swimmer, a cat with nine lives—. O, shameful surrender—! She did not care, and yet she cared supremely. Might it not make a difference?

She felt him swimming beside her, the water washed over her face; she

By Warwick Deeping

kept her mouth shut, and breathed through her nostrils. Something dark overspread the darkness of the water—a tree.

"Safe."

He stood up—helped her to gain her feet.

"That's all right. Where's Joan—"

He began to shout—"Joan—Joan—"

She stood and shivered.

"I'm Joan," she said.

There was a short, deep silence. She heard the water swirling.

"You—!" he said, and was inarticulate.

"I thought you knew. I thought you were calling to Maisie. She can swim like a fish."

He turned—and, standing waist deep, began to call.

"Maisie—Maisie—"

There was no answer. Joan had dragged herself up the bank; she sat down and held her wet head in her hands, while she listened to his calling.

"Maisie—Maisie—" He came scrambling out. "My God!—why—?" Something seemed to smother in him. He glanced at the wet huddle of her on the grass under the tree, and then ran along the bank, calling. His cries seemed to rend her apart. She moaned a little, twisting prone in the darkness. She heard him coming back.

"Joan—she's gone under—"

He did not wait for her to answer, but plunged in again, and began to swim about like a dog searching for a stick. She got up suddenly and, slipping down the bank, began to wade out into the river. Her feet were swept from under her; she struck out, and swimming with a kind of desperate strength, found herself near to Hurst. She could see his dark head.

"Lawrie—where is she?"

He did not answer, but came towards her; he could see her white face floating.

"Go back—Joan; it's dangerous—"

"Why did I let you save me, Lawrie—? O—I wish—"

"Go back, Jo."

"We must find her. O, we must—"

"Go back. You can't face this current—. I'm going to swim across to the other bank. Go back—."

He was within three yards of her when he saw her white face disappear. He struck out fiercely, clutched something—but this time she struggled. He got her to the surface.

"Let me go, Lawrie, O—let me go. I ought not to have let you save me—"

"Don't struggle—"

"I don't want—"

They were being carried down stream; he managed to get behind her, and, with a grip on the collar of her woollen jumper, he brought her into the shallows. He got on his feet and raised her up. His voice had changed its tone.

"Joan, dear—go home. Run, it is only a mile along the towing path. You will get pneumonia—. I'm going in again."

Exhausted, with hands hanging, she trailed through the shallow water to the bank. He had to help her up it. She lay on the grass.

"I'll wait, Lawrie—"

"No—no."

"I must. I'll wait here while you swim across. She may be on the other bank."

"I wish you wouldn't, Jo. It's dangerous for you to lie there."

"I'll wait," she said. "I must wait."

He looked at her mutely, and then went in again and swam across. She heard him calling on the other bank—"Maisie—Maisie—are you here?" But no voice answered, and the silence seemed to bear her down. She lay shivering and waiting; her teeth chattered, yet her conscience was burning. When he came back she would tell him; she would have to tell him.

She heard him climbing the bank

Rescue

some ten yards farther down the stream.

"Joan—where are you?"

"Here."

He came towards her, slouching, very tired.

"Not there——"

She twisted up into a sitting position, her hands clutching the grass.

"Lawrie, I must tell you."

"What?"

She panted.

"I did it on purpose. I let the punt sink on purpose. I didn't care for myself—I mean. I knew that you and Maisie were strong swimmers; I thought you would be safe."

"Joan——!"

"O, the shame of it. I'm shamed for ever—to you. But I—I—had to tell you—whatever you may think—. O—I wish I was there—. I can't bear it, bear to live——"

Suddenly he knelt down beside her.

"Don't speak like that——"

She twisted away, and lying prone, buried her face in the grass. She was shaken with humiliation.

He touched her gently.

"Joan——"

"O, don't, don't touch me—. I'm not fit to live, Lawrie. I won't live——"

He was strangely moved.

"You will—Jo. Nobody will know—but me. I have been rather a thoughtless sort of beast. You are coming home."

He tried to raise her.

"Come, Jo, dear."

"O—no."

"Yes—yes."

He raised her up; he got her on her feet, and stood with an arm firmly about her.

"Come. I mean it. Good God!—how cold you are! Come, dear——"

Still she hung back; she was weeping.

"I wish I could die, Lawrie."

"You are not going to die," he said with sudden and strong emotion in his voice.

The lights of Marley began to shine along a dark loop of the river. She went like one mortally sick, dragging her feet, with heavy silence, sunk in apathy. His arm steadied her, and drew her along, and he was thinking—thinking and feeling. She believed that she had shocked him beyond forgiveness, and she had shocked him, but not as she imagined. That arm of his linking her to him grew more live and self-conscious as they swayed along in the darkness. It was as though he were trailing along with him the body of a woman who was bleeding to death, and it was he who had wounded her. He realized that now. The intensity of her caring, her tragic blurting of the truth, had roused in him a strange tenderness. An hour ago he might have despised her, but now there was something of awe in his awareness of her womanhood.

He heard her speaking; they were nearing the little river town.

"Who'll tell? Poor mother——! She's so soft-hearted—. O—I must."

His arm seemed to tighten about her.

"I will."

"No, Lawrie, it's my—my job."

"No. I was to blame. I ought to have been in charge——"

But she was insistent, and her insistence seemed to give her strength.

"I'm all right—now, Lawrie. It's my job. I must go through with it. And after to-night I must never see you again."

She drew gently away, thrusting him off.

"You will have to try and forgive me. Shameful and horrible!—if one could alter things——"

She walked a little apart, erect now, going to her martyrdom in her wet and clinging clothes. She had ceased to shiver. It was as though the very wetness of her had turned to ice. They passed behind one of the white boat-houses, and entered a road with bungalows and villas fronting the river, each standing

in a garden. Someone was playing a piano; the windows were all lit.

For a moment she stood, shaken and choking, a little way from the gate of her mother's house. Hurst looked at her rather helplessly.

"Let me go in, Jo?"

"No, it is my job."

They reached the gate. She saw the lighted windows of the little drawing-room; the curtains were undrawn; her mother's head showed. Joan pushed open the gate; her head looked rigidly set between her shoulders; she moved stiffly, as though under some inward compulsion. Hurst followed at her heels.

Then came laughter, mischievous, triumphant. They saw a figure jigging in the porch, and outlined in the open doorway.

"Ha—ha—ha—you two! Where—have—you been all this time? Guess I gave you a fright, you cuckoos."

"Maisie——!"

Joan stood very still, and Hurst drew up beside her. It was he who spoke, and his voice sounded brittle.

"How did you get here?"

"I just swam about until you had lugged old Jo ashore. And then I thought I'd have a little game."

"You heard me calling?"

"Did I not! Laugh——!"

She went off into more laughter.

"Old Jo must have gone to sleep in the punt. I just kicked off down stream and climbed ashore lower down, and ran home. I've been changed more than half an hour. I've an awful hunger. Supper's ready."

Hurst saw Joan sway, and he caught her as she fainted. He raised her, held her, and went towards the porch.

"Good Lord!—old Jo's gone off! Never thought she cared for me so much——"

Hurst's face was white.

"Get out of the way," he said.

"You don't know Joan as I do."

She stared at him.

"Temper—temper! You seem a bit peeved, Lawrie."

He pushed her aside with one shoulder, and carried Joan into the house.

In the passage the mother met him, a thin woman with short-sighted blue eyes.

"It is all right, Mrs. Meynell, it is all right——. We thought Maisie was drowned. The shock, you know—the reaction. I'll carry her upstairs."

The mother led the way.

"She is very cold, Mrs. Meynell. Bed and something hot to drink. You see—she went into the water again to try and find her sister."

Mrs. Meynell was switching on lights. There was a sofa in Joan's room, and Hurst laid her upon the sofa, and the dead whiteness of her face and wet darkness of her hair were to him poignant and strange. This was a new Joan, a woman of white intensity, tragical, a little mysterious.

"Can you undress her, Mrs. Meynell. But you will want someone to help you."

"O, ask Maisie."

"No, not Maisie. She's the cause of it all. Is there anyone——?"

"Mrs. Carter—next door. She's so kind and capable. And the doctor—I'd like to have the doctor."

"Of course. I'll go at once. Mrs. Carter first, and then the doctor——"

"But you are all wet, too."

"I'll run. That will warm me."

He glanced at Joan's face and went downstairs. The red-haired girl was waiting below.

"Well—you are a nice lad——! Fancy you getting hold of poor old Jo!"

He did not look at her. He was conscious of disgust, of a spasm of self-scorn. He went out, leaving her looking after him with the impudent smirk of a spoilt child. The three of them had been in deep water and she had not known it, and he—going out into the night—was amazed at her flaunting shallowness. How was it that he had not realized it before? Because he, too, had been a shallow fool?

Rescue

He ran. From the doctor's house he ran on to the little week-end bungalow he had bought on the Marley Meads. He changed into dry clothes. The woman who came in to housekeep for him had left a cold supper laid, and he mixed himself a whisky and made a hurried meal.

What a fool he had been!

He wandered out again, and along by the river all silvered now by the light of the moon. It, too, had changed; it had lost its terror, and become softly mysterious, deep water gliding by. Hurst did not hurry. He was going back to Meynell villa to ask after Joan, but he went soberly, conscious of being drawn towards a new and mysterious Joan. Like the moon, she had climbed up into his sky, clear, white and convincing.

At the Meynell villa a gramophone was playing, and the red head of Maisie showed at the open window. She had expected Hurst to come back, and she was waiting for him.

"Hallo, Lawrie. There's no need to worry. Old Jo's all right."

"I'm glad."

"Come in and have some supper."

"Thanks. I have had supper—I should like to see your mother."

"Oh, all right; I'll call her."

Hurst remained in the garden until he saw Mrs. Meynell's grey head in the drawing-room. Then he went to the window. Maisie had disappeared, but she was near enough to hear what he said.

"No danger, Mrs. Meynell?"

"No, the doctor thinks she is quite all right."

"I'm glad," he said, and stood looking at the moon.

"Will you tell her how glad I am, and how splendid she was?"

"I will tell her, Lawrie."

"Thank you. I shall be round early to-morrow. Ask Joan to let me see her. I shall be grateful if she will."

He went quietly away, and wandered again by the river; in fact, he wandered along Joan's path of martyrdom, and felt a man's awe stealing over him, and a feeling of humility. His manhood had been tested, most mercifully tested. He stood looking at the shadowy mass of the new bridge, and saw the quickly moving water, touched by the moonlight. He remembered the foundered punt—his punt. He supposed that it would be found somewhere, waterlogged or smashed. Did it matter?

Nothing seemed to matter save his new feeling towards Joan.

WARWICK DEEPING.

THE DAY IS RICH

THE day is rich with our discoveries
When we can find two lonely roads like these—
Far from the roads where villages are hung
Like cheap beads on a necklace overstrung;
For here, beyond the sound of horn or wheel,
The forest has a silence you can feel.

What empty intercourse with all the crowds
Was worth these bright encounters with the clouds,
Where, fleeing men and women, we can see
What I have done with time and you with me?

The night with whispers holds us in its deeps;
Becalmed, with us, a sea of tree tops sleeps.
Two lonely roads like these, one up, one down,
Are sweet to find away from any town,
And where no billboard mars the night or noon
Or bids us use some new economical moon!

CHARLES DIVINE.

Pride's Pawnbroker

*It certainly was a Bargain Sale; but
Pr.de makes curious Currency*

By Warwick Deeping



THE little man with the hooked nose and the deep creases round his mouth and eyes got out of his big car at the top of the gardens, and fixed his eyeglass into his right eye. "You can go back to the villa, Jones." "Yes, sir." "Call for me at the entrance to the Casino at a quarter to one." The little man strolled down the broad and sloping path between the stretches of vivid green grass and the beds of cinerarias and violas. He wore a green velour hat, a check suit, biscuit-coloured spats and brown shoes. He smiled, a sardonic, shrewd, triumphant sort of smile, and some of the people on the seats nudged each other or pointed him out to acquaintances who were strange to this great world in miniature.

"Funny old curmudgeon."

"Yes. Wish I had his money."

At the bottom of the path a man rose from a seat and intercepted the celebrity.

"Good morning, Mr. Steinberger."

"Good morning," said the little man in his thick voice.

They stood and chatted. The worldling who had risen from the seat was polite almost to the point of obsequiousness, and this obsequiousness did not fit him as happily as did his clothes. He was the sort of man whom the world calls "distinguished," and expects to find in the diplomatic service. He was tall; he had an aquiline nose, and wore an eyeglass, but his eyeglass was not so convincing as the one that Mr. Steinberger wore. It hid something furtive, the eagerness of a man in search of a favour.

"I shall be awfully obliged to you, my dear sir."

The creases on Mr. Steinberger's bronze-coloured face appeared to deepen. His

smile grew more subtle and sardonic. He was looking up the broad path down which he had come, and his narrow, deep-set eyes were shrewd and attentive.

"You can introduce me to that woman," he said, as though issuing an order.

The other man turned.

"What, to her, to Lady Ludlow?" he asked with an air of furtive dismay.

"I think so," said Mr. Steinberger with a suggestive menace in his smile.

A woman was coming towards them, down the path. She was tall, young, brilliantly fair, with a wonderful skin, and haughty, liquid eyes. Her movement was a gliding motion. She seemed to typify serenity, a pride that was both cold and passionate, an aloofness from the little world of puppets who spend their lives trying to make both ends meet. Her red mouth was a perfect bow. She was most exquisitely dressed.

The diplomatic person, whose name was Sandys, took off his hat to her and made a rather apologetic approach.

"Good morning, Lady Ludlow."

She gave him a faint smile.

"What! You are not in your favourite seat yet?"

"I'm changing it—for luck," he laughed.

"Oh, by the way, may I introduce a friend of mine? Mr. Maurice Steinberger—Lady Ludlow."

Mr. Steinberger removed his hat.

"Delighted and honoured," said he.

Lady Ludlow said nothing. She looked at him, down at him, at his creased face, the green velour hat in his hand, at his check waistcoat. Her nostrils seemed to narrow. She gave him the very slightest inclination of the head, but she did not utter a word.

Sandys looked embarrassed, and talked hard to cover it. Mr. Steinberger put on his velour hat, and there were little gleams in his eyes. Lady Ludlow looked over his head at the white facade of the Casino.

At the end of half a minute she walked on, leaving Sandys and Mr. Steinberger marooned in the middle of the pathway, and Mr. Steinberger's face was an ironical mask.

"Charming woman!" said he; "so gracious."

Sandys felt for his cigarette case.

"A bit stuck up, I think."

"My dear sir, she has a sense of her own value. Pure gold, what—pure gold! You were not popular this morning, Mr. Sandys."

"Why? What do you mean?"

Mr. Steinberger's creases ran into each other.

"I saw the look she gave you: What do you mean by introducing that little beast of a Jew to me?"

"My dear Mr. Steinberger, I——!"

"Hush!" said the little man, "these things give a spice to life."

Punctually at a quarter to one Mr. Steinberger stepped into his super-car and was driven to his villa—the Villa Flora—on the outskirts of Monte Carlo. He sat in the car with his two hands resting on his cane and his chin supported on his hands. He smiled, and his smile suggested many things—cunning, malice, a fanatical pride, scathing humour, mordant scorn.

"That's what I am," he said to himself, "a dirty little Jew! Well, well! She might have found the Jew better than she thought him if she had behaved more like a Christian."

Fate, too, can be ironical, and about half-past five that afternoon Celestia Ludlow was returning to the Hotel St. Denis from the Princesse de Rochefort's villa when she met a man walking at a great pace up the hill down which she was strolling. The man was her husband, and there was nothing singular in this, but what did surprise her was that he was looking about ten years older than when they had met at lunch. He had lost his colour, and he had that drawn look which narrows a man's face when he is in pain.

Celestia was not the woman to ask obvious questions. Something was wrong. She knew that directly her eyes met his.

"I thought I would come and meet you," he said.

She knew that Richard Ludlow was still very much in love with her, but never before had she seen him afraid. And he

was afraid of her and for her, afraid of something that he knew and that she did not know, something which would hurt her and hurt her badly. She felt the appeal in his eyes, the appeal of a man who has made a ghastly mess of some enterprise, and whose love shrinks from the telling of it to the woman whom it will wound.

"I may as well tell you at once," he said, putting himself beside her and looking over the red roofs of this cosmopolitan southern town to the blue of the sea, "I have had a piece of rather bad news."

"Is it Hal?" she asked, steadying herself, for Hal was their boy.

"No, thank God!"

"Money?"

"Yes—money."

She drew a deep breath of relief, for what was money and the loss of it when she had feared for her son?

"Oh, Dick, you frightened me! Wait, don't tell me any more now."

She laid a hand on his arm and it trembled, for her seeming coldness and her brilliant serenity were on the surface of life, a beautiful cuirass shown to the world.

"All right," said her husband, "but it is rather bad, old girl."

When they reached their hotel they went straight to their little suite on the first floor, with its balcony overhanging the mimosa and the palms in the garden below. The sunset had come suddenly, and they could see the headland of Monaco and the town below all splashed with golden light, but the glow was like a dying illusion. The sudden chill of the sunset was upon them.

Ludlow closed the windows. Celestia was taking off her furs. She noticed that he lingered at the window as though he found it difficult to turn and face her.

"Dick, it is kinder to blurt it out."

"The Lobengan Company has smashed," he said.

For a moment she did not realize the full meaning of the news. Like many men, Ludlow had always been reticent over money matters, not out of meanness, but because it had always seemed to him that his wife's serene beauty was above such things. She knew that since the war matters had been difficult to many of the old families whose money was in land.

"What is it?" she asked. "You never told me, Dick."

"I know. I suppose I ought to have told you. The fact is I did not want you to be worried. But we have been in rather a tight corner for a long time."

She looked at his drawn and troubled face, and suddenly she seemed to realize that he had grown rather grey and worn, and her heart smote her.

"You have had it all to yourself, poor man. But what is it?"

She sat down in one of the big chairs, while he lit a cigarette.

"Cowpers," he said; "it is a question of selling Cowpers."

"Dick, you cannot mean——"

He flung the match into the fireplace and nodded.

"The fact is, old girl, we were losing money badly on the estate, but I wanted to try and save the place, so I scraped what cash I could together and tried a gamble. Of course I ought to have known that I am not the sort of man who makes money in a gamble. Still Eason put me on to it, and it seemed to be a pretty sure thing. Well, it wasn't!"

"Have you lost much, Dick?"

"Some thousands."

"But, dear man, we can survive that."

"Wait a moment, old girl. The damnable part of it is that the Lobengan shares were only partly paid up; there will be a call, and I shall have to throw good money after that which has gone."

"But surely," she said, incredulous, unable to visualize the loss of the place she loved, "you can borrow?"

"I am having to borrow as it is, and it is not too easy. Few of our crowd have much to play with these days, and somehow I cannot bring myself to go to the Jews."

She was startled. The incident of the morning flashed back on her like an ironical coincidence, and with it came a vision of Cowpers, that old red-and-grey house with its rolling country, spacious, and clean and lovable. She sat and stared out of the window, for her English home had appeared to her framed in the greenness of an English spring. She loved it, but she knew that her love had a deeper meaning, in that Cowpers should be her son's after they were gone.

"Dick," she said, "it's impossible. Surely you can mortgage the farms?"

"They are mortgaged," he said gloomily.

"I'll sell my jewels. My dear, I am thinking of Hal."

He came quickly to her, and taking her face between his hands kissed her.

"God bless you, old girl, you haven't called me a fool! I'm thinking of the boy too. God knows I want him to have the place as I had it, and all the people before me. No, keep your jewels. I'll see what can be done."

"You are going home?"

"Yes, I must see the lawyer people. But I want you to stay here. We have got to keep up a bold front, Celia, and you are rather good at that sort of thing. I'm not going to be pitied by all this new crowd."

"Dick, I'm on your side," she said. "We'll fight together."

But a struggle had begun in her, though she was hardly aware of it as yet—a struggle between her pride and her passionate love of the place which was to be her son's.

So Sir Richard Ludlow went north to see what could be done to save Cowpers, while Lady Celestia sailed serenely through the social life of the place as though financial storms were things unknown.

Beyond telling her acquaintances that her husband had been called home on business she offered no explanation to anybody, and asked for sympathy from none. Not a soul in Monte Carlo was supposed to know that the Ludlows had had losses, and Celestia Ludlow was not the sort of woman who felt or looked poor.

Some three days after her husband had left Monte Carlo she met Mr. Maurice Steinberger on the steps of the Casino. He took off his hat to her and gave her a creased and happy smile, and she found herself smiling back at him. She was surprised by her own smile. It was both prompted and explained by the quick thought that it was really rather decent of the fellow to smile at her after the way she had snubbed him.

"I did not know that you were one of the victims, Mr. Steinberger!"

His shrewd eyes lit up.

"That depends on what you mean by a victim! I am going in to pay my monthly subscription."

"Your subscription?"

"I use the library and I am grateful to them for the music, but to be under an obligation to them, no!"

She was surprised in spite of herself, not by his love of music, but by his refusal to get something for nothing. They entered the Casino together with the air of old acquaintances.

"So you pay your subscription, Mr. Steinberger?"

"By losing a certain sum of money. It is quite easy."

"But don't you sometimes inconveniently win?"

"Oh, well," he said, with a characteristic gesture of the hands, "one can always correct such accidents. I never gamble; I never have gambled. I prefer to use my head."

"You are a wise man, Mr. Steinberger," she said.

They parted in the vestibule, but later she came upon him by one of the tables. He was standing beside one of the croupiers; she saw him toss two or three counters on to the table and give the croupier instructions to place them on thirteen. The ball was set spinning. "*Rien ne va plus*," said the mechanical, toneless voice. Mr. Steinberger raised his eyes, and they met the eyes of Celestia Ludlow across the table.

He smiled. Number seventeen turned up, and Mr. Steinberger's counters were swept away. He appeared pleased, relieved as though he had finished with a boring detail of the day's routine.

"He looks so impossible," the woman was thinking, "and yet—"

She saw him move from his place, and instantly she had a feeling that he was coming to join her. And that was what he did. His bright and equivocal eyes were merry.

"I have paid my toll."

"Do you always do that on principle?" she asked.

"Always. Money! What is money? So hardly got and so easily lost."

She gave him a quick and observant look.

"I wish I could do both as gracefully as you do, Mr. Steinberger."

He made her a slight bow.

"I am sure that Lady Ludlow could teach me many things," he said.

Half an hour later he was in his car on

the way home to his villa, sitting in that thoughtful yet slightly sinister attitude of his, and smiling his creased smile.

Celestia Ludlow went out and sat in the gardens in the sunlight. Something had emerged from the back of her mind—something that amazed her. It was the thought that this little man paid tribute, and paid it conscientiously for the good things of life which he desired. And there were many things which such a man might desire—social recognition, place and power, the entry into certain houses, certain circles. Her thoughts expanded. She saw herself giving him the introduction he might desire, and he would pay for it, not with mere vulgar cash, but with priceless, prophetic information that might retrieve poor Dick's blind gambling.

She started up with a shiver of scorn.

"No, it couldn't be done," she thought. "Besides, what a fool I am! It is nothing but a beastly dream."

Yet from that time onwards she was always meeting Mr. Steinberger, and wherever she went he had a strange way of turning up. She began to lose some of her distaste for him, but perhaps the subtle reason for this was that she wanted to lose it, though she shirked facing the crude fact.

Mr. Steinberger was an oddity, but a very potent oddity. He had a head rather like a faun's, a mischievous yet not unkindly faun. His life was supposed to be eccentric, and when at home at the Villa Flora his dress was supposed to be as eccentric as his life. He was said to wear sandals and to wander about in gorgeous dressing-gowns which suggested the Orient. The place was full of exquisite pictures and antiques, and there was no garden to equal the Villa Flora's garden. Someone had called it the "Hanging Garden of Babylon."

Celestia Ludlow found him more polished within than without. Whatever his financial activities had been his mental activity was phenomenal. He was an expert on several subjects.

She happened to mention to him her love of precious stones.

"I have a collection," he said. "They say I collect everything. Jews keep what they get, Lady Ludlow."

"And so do we—if we can," she laughed.

PRIDE'S PAWNBROKER

She had come towards being quite gracious to him. He amused her; he had such a wicked tongue and such a droll way of putting things. He impressed her, though it was much against her wish to be impressed.

"I believe Lady Ludlow has some beautiful things?"

"They have been with us a long time, Mr. Steinberger."

"You ought to be careful of them here. It is a wicked place."

"Oh, I bring out the paste reproductions."

He smiled at her.

"I have seen you wearing stones that were not paste," he said.

"You have a very quick eye."

He looked pleased.

"I collect other things. Perhaps Lady Ludlow would like to see some of my treasures? I could arrange a little party."

She hesitated, and then she took the first blind yet studied step.

"I shall be delighted. I expect my husband back again in a few days. I am sure he would be glad to see your treasures."

For the news from England was distinctly bad.

"I have tried one or two people," Ludlow wrote, "and they say they haven't the money, and I believe it's the truth. I am in a worse mess than I thought I



"When your ladyship pleases—I am ready," he said

was. You don't know what I feel about your not calling me a fool."

Later he wrote:

"Pounds is shy of trying to raise second mortgages on the estate. He says, too, that since the slump farms are not very saleable."

She wrote in reply:

"What about my jewels, anything? Cowpers must be saved for Hal!"

His next letter was more gloomy:

"DEAREST,—I thank you, but your sacrifice would be so inadequate—I mean in its effect. Pounds is pressing me more and more to sell Cowpers and the whole estate. He seems to think it our only one chance of solvency."

She wrote back:

"Don't do anything rash. We must think it over."

A few days later she had his reply:

"I have told Pounds that I will do nothing till I have seen you, and that we will let him have our decision at the end of three weeks. I have been down to Winchester and seen Hal. Of course I told the boy nothing. But it hurt me, old girl, and I know how it is hurting you. I shall be with you in a few days."

She had to face the uncompromising truth, for often we refuse to face it until the truth's cold eyes stare into ours and ask us that final question: "What now?" What now, indeed! She loved that stately English place set in its tranquil landscape, the fineness of its tradition, the personal and intimate note it had for her. She was proud, almost bitterly proud, and Cowpers was part of her pride. But more than all she wanted Cowpers for her son. The loss of Cowpers would be symbolical, suggesting the passing of the Ludlows before the coming of the new, raw men. She hated the new men, and she hated them with passion.

"Someone will buy us out, buy Hal out of what should be his. Some pulp merchant or jam manufacturer! I'll fight. I'll fight to the bitter end."

She hardened herself, and there was a vein of cynicism in her hardness.

"Dick is too sensitive," she thought;

"too much the gentleman. Tooth and claw! I must fight—for Hal's sake."

The decision came to her on the day of Mr. Maurice Steinberger's party, and she drove to the Villa Flora feeling like a starved cat watching for a possible mouse. It was a cosmopolitan party, and had she felt less desperate she would have enjoyed the crude and humorous contrasts of it. There were two nasal Americans who tried to out-talk and out-boast each other, a Spanish Jew, two vague ladies who came from Paris, a Swedish doctor and a Siamese prince. Mr. Steinberger was quite the dominant figure; he looked mellow and almost classic when compared with the Americans.

He showed them his pictures, his furniture and his garden without any air of ostentation, but rather with the gentle enthusiasm of a man who loved beautiful things. He managed to convey the impression to all those who were present that the afternoon was unique because Lady Ludlow was with them. His homage was subtle and delicate. A month ago she would have thought him incapable of such restrained courtesy.

When the others left she lingered. She sat calmly in her chair in his beautiful loggia, with its smothering cloud of wistaria and roses, and its pillars clear-cut against the blue of the sea. Below, rising close to the parapet of the great terrace, were tall cypresses stately and very still. The beauty of the place gave her courage, and made her feel that there must be more here than mere money.

"I want to ask your advice, Mr. Steinberger."

He gave her his creased smile.

"Men love to give advice, Lady Ludlow."

She did not look at him, but kept her eyes on the sea.

"Don't think me impertinent, but I have a very valuable necklace which I wish to sell. I am wondering whether you would give me your opinion on it?"

She did not see the gleam in his eyes.

"Why, certainly," he said suavely, "with pleasure. Have you the necklace with you?"

"No. It is locked up in the hotel safe. You could come and see it, or I could bring it."

She glanced at him. His face looked impassively kind and shrewd.

PRIDE'S PAWNBROKER

"Oh, we will arrange that. But tell me, might I be allowed to know——"

She stiffened, and then compelled herself to relax, for there were other faces behind the face of this old Jew.

"Why I wish to sell it?"

"I should deeply appreciate Lady Ludlow's confidence."

She held her breath for a moment.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Steinberger. I want to make money. It is absolutely essential that I should make money."

He nodded, and waved a hand towards Monte Carlo.

"I hope you have not——"

"Oh, no, no!" she said. "It is more serious and more dignified than that. My husband has had a piece of bad luck. How would you like to be compelled to sell this place, Mr. Steinberger?"

"Not at all," said he.

"Our place has been in the family for five hundred years."

He remained silent for some seconds. She glanced at him and saw nothing but a little, creased, shrewd old man with very intelligent eyes. He appeared to be thinking.

"May I make a suggestion?" he asked.

"Of course."

"I suggest that Lady Ludlow should return to her hotel and bring back the necklace. I suggest that she should dine with me. My car is at her service."

Her rigidity returned, and he noticed it.

"Oh, come, a little dinner with an old man! I shall count it a very great honour. And afterwards we can examine the necklace."

She clutched at her decision.

"Mr. Steinberger, I accept."

His car carried her to her hotel. In response to a note the manager himself brought the shagreen case to her room, and when he had gone she opened the case on her dressing-table and took out the string of diamonds. Her mood was a mixture of cynicism and sacrificial emotion, for she tried to laugh while she was in the act of sacrificing her pride.

"After all, what is it but a piece of business? I shall get an expert's assistance, and in return I shall give him social recognition. Heavens, what is there to feel tragic about?"

She rang for her maid and dressed, and she wore the necklace under her furs.

"I shall not be late, Francis."

She had visions of returning triumphantly to that same room.

On reaching the Villa Flora she was met by Mr. Steinberger in the vestibule. It appeared that he had allowed himself to lapse into one of his eccentricities, for instead of the conventional black and white he was wearing a purple dressing-gown and a coloured tunic underneath it. He apologized for the lapse.

"I hope you will forgive an old man's whim?"

She smiled.

"It means that we do not mean to be formal!"

The dinner was an elaborately simple affair, and Mr. Steinberger's conversation was as good as the dinner. He appeared to be enjoying himself, and he was delicately careful not to glance at the necklace she was wearing. At the end of the meal he bowed her out on to the loggia, for it was a mild and beautiful night.

"We can talk here, Lady Ludlow."

A manservant brought out coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes.

"John, fetch Lady Ludlow's furs."

"Yes, sir."

She took a cigarette and Mr. Steinberger struck a match and held it for her, and the light played upon his shrewd, creased face.

"When your ladyship pleases—I am ready," he said.

He closed the door opening into the dining-room, touched a switch and the loggia sprang into light. She had unfastened the clasp of her necklace, and she passed it to him with a casual gesture.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Steinberger."

"The honour is mine," he said, with a sneer which she did not see.

He examined the necklace, while she sat and smoked her cigarette. He appeared to be in no hurry, and she began to wonder what was behind his shrewd, dark face. His eyes seemed to have sunk more deeply under the arched eyebrows.

"It is, very valuable," he said presently.

"It is eighteenth-century work, Mr. Steinberger."

"Yes, and the stones are superb and exquisitely cut, but I have one rather peculiar whim."

"Oh?" she said.

"I always like to see precious stones by moonlight. You have never tried that test, I suppose?"

"I cannot say that I have," she answered.

"Would you deign to come down with me to the terrace?"

His voice had a note of irony, but she rose, and, drawing her fur stole over her shoulders, showed herself prepared to humour him.

She found herself standing beside one of the great cypress trees, with the blue night above and the blue gloom of the sea below. Mr. Steinberger was holding the necklace up into the moonlight.

"You wish to sell this, Lady Ludlow?"

"That depends," she said.

His voice suddenly became the voice of the tempter.

"It pleases me. Supposing I give you five thousand pounds for it? Supposing I invest the money in a way that will ensure it being trebled in the course of a month?"

She looked at him, and it seemed to her that his smile became sinister.

"We might make a bargain. Isn't that your ladyship's idea?"

She turned away from him.

"What are your terms?"

She waited for his reply, and no reply came. He was close there behind her, and he did not utter a word. She began to wonder, to feel acutely uncomfortable, and then she was aware of a hand, a lean hand thrusting itself from behind her and holding that string of precious stones.

"I think, woman, that we are quits," he said.

She stood rigid, for there was scorn in his voice, an immense irony.

"Take back your diamonds. You thought that you could use me, Lady Ludlow. You thought that you could make me a sort of pawnbroker. Do you remember that morning when you looked over the head of the little beast of a Jew?"

"Mr. Steinberger!" she said.

He rattled the stones.

"Take them. Pah! All you people have your price. The Jew was to be ignored until you thought you could make use of him. Yes, he would bargain. Such a creature could not be allowed to have pride. You would take his money and pick his brain, and then

ask the beast to dinner! Lady Ludlow, you made a very great mistake. A Jew has his pride."

Never had she been so angry, but with her anger was mingled humiliation and shame. For what he said was true—she had conspired to use him.

Her stole had slipped off one shoulder. She readjusted it, and almost with a shrinking movement she took the necklace from that waiting hand.

"I am sorry, Mr. Steinberger," she said. "It seems that you and I have insulted each other. People who have pride should not insult each other. I think you have been rather cruel to me."

He was watching her.

"Was there no cruelty to me?" he asked. "An old man—a rather lonely old man? Did it never occur to you that I might have feelings, that I might be sensitive?"

She paused, head up, an almost stricken look upon her face.

"Mr. Steinberger," she said, "if I have hurt your feelings, I am sorry. Let us agree that all this is at an end. I think I will walk back to my hotel."

Suddenly he was beside her and slightly in front of her.

"Wait," he said with a kind of gentle fierceness; "I want your ladyship to answer a question."

She turned on him. They looked at each other in the moonlight.

"Do you dare to ask me a question?"

"I dare. I appeal to you to answer it. Why did you sink your pride to do this?"

"Mr. Steinberger," she said, "it is impossible for me—"

"Lady Ludlow," he retorted, "if I sink my pride to ask a question, cannot you sink yours to answer it? Are you going to let the Jew rise higher than yourself?"

"You wish me to tell you why I came to you?"

"Yes."

"To try and save the place I love—my home."

"For yourself?"

"No," she said. "I did it for my son."

"I understand," he said. "If the Jew can ask to be forgiven, can the Christian ask to be forgiven by the Jew?"

And suddenly she stretched out her hand to him.

"Forgive me, Mr. Steinberger."

He bent and kissed her hand.

The Island

By

WARWICK DEEPING

12

THE man in the bow of the black

Never had Mr. Holt been responsible for so eccentric a funeral, or for carrying out the last instructions of a more eccentric client

pillars of the loggia, a tall old man with a coercive white moustache seemed to be sniff-

punt ran his pole into the mud and held the boat against the stone landing-stage.

"All ready, sir."

Mr. Holt tapped his knuckles with his pince-nez and looked mistrustfully at the punt.

"I suppose you two can manage? The bearers will meet you at Lulham."

"Is there anybody else to come in the punt, sir, besides Mr. Archibald?"

The lawyer appeared to reflect.

"No, I think not. Mr. Anthony is going by road."

The lawyer went slowly up the stone steps, reflecting that never had he been responsible for so eccentric a funeral, or for carrying out the last instructions of a more eccentric client. He paused half-way up the steps to glance right and left along Mr. Archibald Kesteven's great rose walk, brilliant with its second blooming, dew washed and fragrant. The river was flecked with sunlight and dappled with the shadows of the poplars and the willows. Mr. Holt stood and meditated, casting a philosophic eye upon Mr. Archibald's roses, and upon the mellow reds and soft greys of the house standing at the top of the flight of steps. Kesteven had loved the fine texture of life, the petal of a rose, the graining of English oak, the massive smoothness of well-faced stone. A fastidious man with a pair of fiercely ironic eyes! And how he had hated people, more especially his own relatives! You could never feel sure how you stood with Kesteven. He had had so few words, and so many shades to his smile, and always he had suggested secret laughter, the laughter of a gentle yet mocking faun.

Mr. Holt resumed his ascent. At the top of the steps, by one of the Ionic

ing the September air with his adventurous nose.

"The boat's there, Sir Hereward."

"Ah," said the tall man, "is it?" and looked over the top of Mr. Holt's head.

Mr. Holt scrutinized one of the lead figures poised on a terminal pillar of the balustrade.

"I rather respect consistency," he said.

Sir Hereward put his head on one side like a bird.

"The most consistent man I ever knew. But—there was always a laugh, you know."

"Exactly. Something behind. The fact is I have had a most queer feeling ever since I have been here."

"You can hear him laughing?"

"I can't feel sure that he isn't playing off a last jest on us. The fact is, I can't find his will."

Mr. Holt polished his glasses, while Sir Hereward watched a hawk which was hovering over a meadow across the water. He had the eyes and the skin of a man who had lived much in the open air, and the lawyer's fussiness left him unmoved.

"Probably he has hidden it. The sort of thing he would do. But didn't you draft it for him?"

"Ten years ago, yes. But I believe that he had a codicil added when he was abroad."

"Ah!"

"Before he met that Mrs. Vance. Perhaps you know, sir?"

"Yes, I know. He had his reasons, and very good reasons. The only woman he ever met who knew how to let well alone. And he was rather fond of the child."

"I believe so."

Sir Hereward examined the crease of his right trouser leg.

"In the original will that pup——"

Mr. Holt glanced carefully in the direction of the house.

"Mr. Anthony inherits. Mr. Archibald had provided for Mrs. Vance and her daughter. And, of course, if we can produce no will he will still inherit."

Sir Hereward said nothing, but his silence was more unflattering to Mr. Anthony Kesteven than any words.

A very decorous and black figure appeared in the portico, gold watch in black-gloved hand, his black whiskers looking as though they had been put on for the occasion. It was Mr. Golland, the undertaker, very much the man of the moment, and a little fussy over the punctuality of the programme.

"It is ten minutes to two, Mr. Holt. I take it that if we allow the punt"—Mr. Golland hesitated over the almost blasphemous oddity—"twenty minutes to reach Lulham."

Mr. Holt pulled out his watch.

"I think we ought to be starting. Is everything ready?"

"Quite, sir. I have had the coffin brought down into the hall, and the cars are waiting over on the road."

Mr. Golland glanced over his shoulder.

"Mr. Anthony Kesteven—I can't find him, sir."

Sir Hereward dusted his waistcoat and smiled.

"I think you will find him in the billiard-room. He was there ten minutes ago." But Sir Hereward did not tell Mr. Golland that he had seen Mr. Anthony Kesteven with a cigarette in his mouth, knocking the billiard balls about while he was waiting for his father's body to be placed in the punt.

It was the eccentric funeral of a most eccentric man. "I direct," Mr. Archibald had written, "that my body shall be placed in a punt and poled to Lulham by the two Brookers, who work the ferry. They shall receive five pounds apiece for this service. I desire no one to be present at my burial, save Mr. Holt, my lawyer, and Sir Hereward Blake, my friend. My son will be chiefly interested in seeing me safely under the ground. Explicit." So Mr. Archibald was buried, and Mr. Holt and Sir Hereward drove back in the September sunlight with Mr. Archibald's son, whose fat and colourless face expressed both boredom and amuse-

ment. Sir Hereward, the man of the horse and of the open air, could not abide this young man, who would make you an epigram while he stirred his tea-cup, and who knew what all the newest and most clever fellows were doing in art or in literature. Anthony Kesteven's face was an offence to Sir Hereward. "Like an unbaked bun with two currants stuck in it." And the fellow was going to be lord of Kesteven Island and Kesteven House, and all the beauty and queerness of character it contained.

Moreover, Master Anthony knew it and assumed it to be an established fact. He was rubbing the reality of it into his two elders before the car had pulled up opposite the Japanese footbridge.

"What time is your train, sir? One of the cars is at your service."

Sir Hereward, with a Jovian stare, suddenly remembered that he had to dine in Town.

"Oh, Holt, you better have a bed here. We may as well get through with the business."

Mr. Holt remained, putting an austere formalism between himself and this young man. At dinner Mr. Anthony made the announcement that he proposed to sell the island and the house and all this "museum stuff," as he called it. "No use to a live man, Holt." Mr. Holt, sipping the Kesteven port, with the old gold curtains drawn behind him, and the oak-panelled room deep in shadow, was thinking of the dead man rather than of the live one. He laid a restraining hand on Anthony Kesteven's contemptuous haste.

"In the absence of a will——"

"I inherit."

"Precisely. But I assume the existence of a will. I know that a will was made."

Anthony dabbled his fat fingers in the brass finger-bowl.

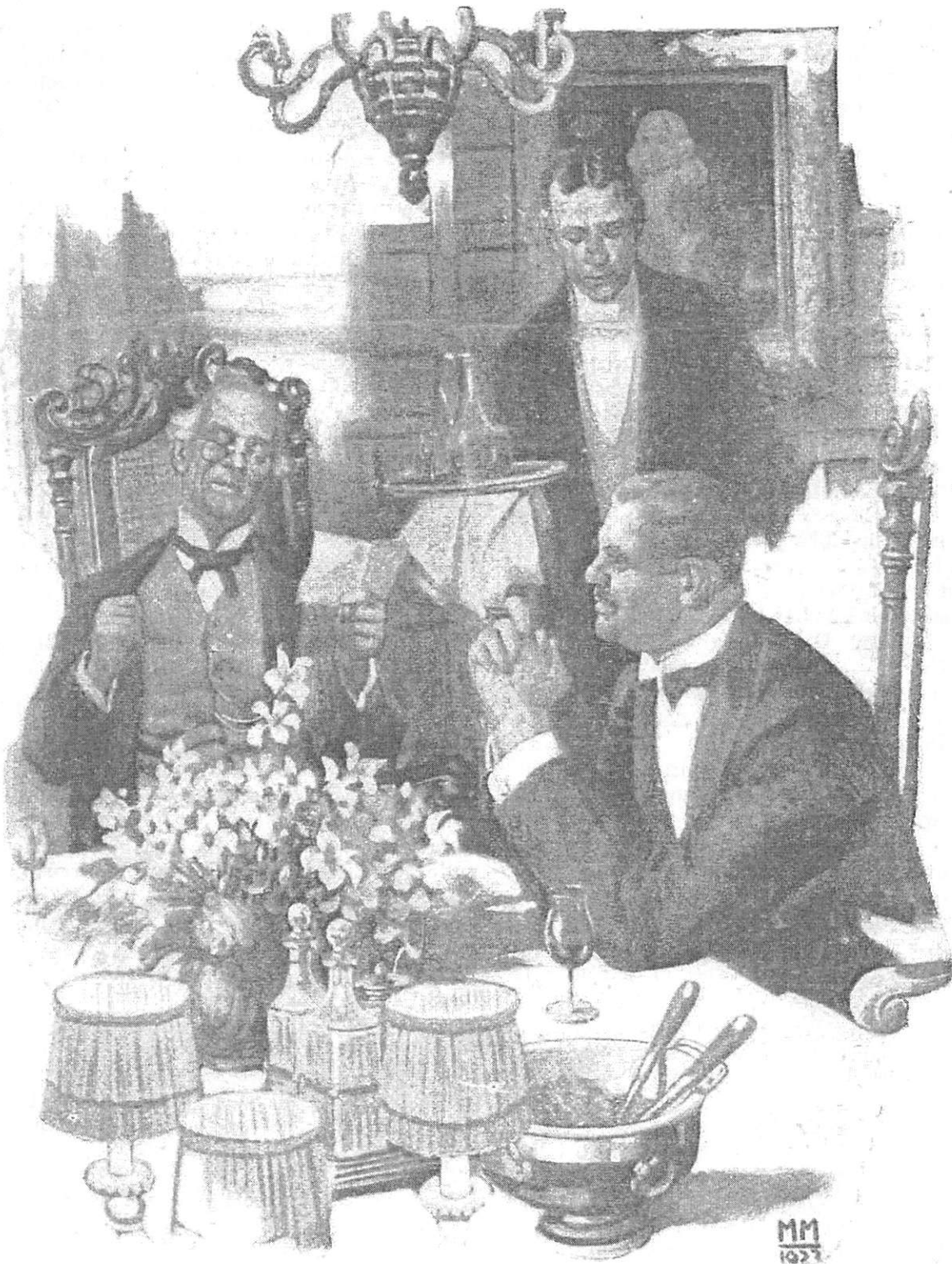
"A will which went to prove one of the silly old sayings that blood is thicker than water. My father detested me, in fact, we detested each other. And out of cussedness he left me his money."

"You seem very sure, Mr. Kesteven."

Anthony felt in the breast pocket of his dinner jacket and produced a letter.

"Read that. My father wrote that letter a month before he died."

Mr. Holt turned his chair, adjusted his glasses and read the letter. It was



Mr. Holt turned his chair, adjusted his glasses and read the letter

very simple and to the point; it hinted at the possibility of no will being discovered, and suggested the obvious conclusion. "Youth takes what age does not give." And yet this letter produced in the austere and unemotional Mr. Holt a feeling of uncertainty, as though the

dead man were smiling one of his elusive smiles. The lawyer remembered Mr. Archibald's long white hand; he remembered dining here at this very table and watching that delicate and ironic hand spinning a wine glass without a drop of the red wine being spilled. Almost he

could imagine that hand extending itself from the shadows and making some mysterious gesture. The room was full of the dead presence. The son did not feel it, but the lawyer did, though he put it down to the chilliness of an autumn evening.

Mr. Holt handed back the letter.

"It has an appearance of finality. But we must make every effort."

Young Kesteven refilled his glass.

"Import a professional will-finder, or a clairvoyant!"

"If there is a will we shall find it."

But no will was found, though Mr. Holt brought down two of the clerks from his London office and impressed a cabinet maker and restorer of antiques into the search to examine the many Kesteven chests, bureaux and cabinets. Every book in the library was taken down. Mr. Archibald's old servants were examined and examined again as to their dead master's whimsies and queer, secretive ways. Mr. Holt remained baffled, yet obstinately sure that the will was somewhere in the house. He began to mistrust Mr. Anthony Kesteven. That sophisticated and supercilious young man, with his currant-bun face, might know much more than he appeared to know.

At the end of three days Mr. Holt returned to town, leaving Anthony Kesteven in possession.

"My dear sir," the young man had said, "something will have to be done. If there is no will—well, I suppose it can be assumed?"

Mr. Holt had showed contentiousness.

"I am convinced that there is a will. I propose to act for the time being on that conviction."

For a possible clue had suggested itself to Mr. Holt, and on the following day he set out for a certain small town in the Isle of Wight, where a Mrs. Vance had a house. Mr. Archibald Kesteven had given her the house and purchased for her a comfortable annuity. Mr. Holt knew that Mr. Archibald's happiest days had been spent in this house with the woman who had understood him, and with whom he had spent three months of each year. Mr. Holt had never met Mrs. Vance, or Mrs. Vance's daughter. It was possible that Mrs. Vance could help him.

This was on the seventh of September, and on the very same day, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Anthony Kesteven, who was taking tea in the loggia, heard the river bell ringing on the other side of the water. The bell was hung in a little wooden belfry under an old yew tree on the mainland where the Kesteven private road came down to the river. The ringing of the bell warned those on the island that someone was waiting to be brought across, and one of the gardeners would pole a punt from the landing-stage and ferry the visitor over to the island. On the other side of the island the Japanese bridge led to the north bank of the river, and it had been one of Mr. Archibald's perverse decrees that no one should use the bridge save Mr. Archibald Kesteven himself. Coal, provisions, even the manure for the garden had had to be loaded up in a punt and shipped across in this thoroughly unpractical fashion.

Through a gap between the willows Mr. Anthony Kesteven could see a girl waiting on the farther bank, and presuming her to be one of the maids, he thought no more about it. A man went across for her; there was a short conversation between them; the girl entered the punt, and the man poled it back towards the island. The boat disappeared behind the willows, and Mr. Anthony Kesteven, munching dry toast, paid no attention to the voices that drifted up to him from the landing-stage.

Half a minute later he found himself being addressed by a strange young woman. She had come up the flight of steps to the loggia, and was observing him with a pair of serious dark eyes, and Mr. Kesteven was surprised by the impression he received that her eyes were hostile.

"Are you Mr. Anthony Kesteven?"

She shot the question at him without ceremony and with a directness that ignored either apologies or explanations. She intruded as though she had every right to intrude, and yet her boldness was impersonal, suggesting that her coming had been imposed upon her by some other person or by a sensitive response to a sense of duty. She was a rather plain young woman, but to the people who mattered her plainness was effaced by the expressiveness of her eyes.

Mr. Kesteven remained in his chair.

"What do you want?"

"So you are Mr. Kesteven. I suppose you expect me to explain."

There was a vacant chair, and she took it, and Mr. Kesteven's little brown-black eyes scrutinized her with a surprised wariness.

"I sent my suit-case in by the man."

Suit-case indeed! Mr. Anthony had not observed the suit-case. The article was provocative and significant.

"I beg your pardon!"

"I am staying here for a night or two."

"Indeed! I'm afraid I haven't the honour of knowing—"

She looked him straight in his sallow and self-indulgent face.

"I have been invited."

"May I ask by whom?"

"Your father."

"My father was buried four days ago."

"I know. But he wished me to come here; he wishes me to come here."

Mr. Kesteven assumed a more alert attitude.

"Indeed! It occurs to me that you must be—"

"My name is Vance."

"Exactly. And may I point out to you, Miss Vance, that your invitation is a little out of date?"

She made a movement of the head.

"No. I do not wish to explain how or why. You may think me a little impertinent and a little mad."

He gave her an unpleasant smile.

"Not at all. I think I appreciate the situation. It is a question of expectations."

She looked at him for a moment as though he had offered her a wanton insult, but she showed no sign of temper.

"No, you are quite wrong. I don't think you are the sort of person to whom I can explain. You see, Mr. Archibald Kesteven was a very unusual man. Very few people understood him."

"I was not one of them!"

"It seems so. Anyway, I loved him. Perhaps that astonishes you?"

"Nothing astonishes me."

"So I should imagine."

Her irony annoyed him. He had set her down as an adventuress, and her hostility struck him as being a little illogical and tactless.

"May I ask you how you received this invitation? Was it by letter?"

"Oh, no."

He raised his eyebrows and waited.

"I felt invited; I felt that I had to come."

"Oh, a sort of sentimental pilgrimage!"

"Perhaps."

He glanced at his watch. He was piqued by this young person's hostility and by the subtle way she had managed to make him feel that he did not belong to Kesteven Island, and that it was an anomaly that it should belong to him. She was a partisan of his father's; nor had he believed her when she had denied the cherishing of any expectations. It seemed to Anthony Kesteven that the best way to snub her would be to make this young person as comfortable as it was possible to make her, to be indifferently polite and politely indifferent. He would put her in her place.

He rose.

"I will get Mrs. Part, the housekeeper, to arrange for you. I appreciate the fact that you may like to have the chance of absorbing the atmosphere of the place before—"

She, too, had risen; she interrupted him.

"So you are selling it?"

He gave her a glance of cold protest. Really! What the devil had it to do with her?

"My lawyer has instructions to sell."

"And all—his—things?"

"Certainly. I don't propose to live here. The house is a museum."

"Of beauty!"

"Oh, that's a matter of opinion."

He went in with a sneer, leaving her standing in the loggia, her dark eyes absorbing her surroundings, her hands resting on the back of the chair. She saw nothing but a beautiful greenness, a soft curtain of verdure that seemed drawn about the island, the folds of it trailing in the secret stillness of the water and making another greenness there. She felt the peace of the place, the sense of its withdrawal from all vulgar and ugly things. It had pride, the immense and serene pride of solitude.

"And yet his thoughts went out," she reflected. "No man did more kind things in secret than he did. But he would not

touch common things; he had no cheap sensibility; he was fastidious. He wanted me to come here. He wanted me to feel something. I can understand that. But had he any other reason? Is he still here, watching us, judging us, smiling that smile of his? Perhaps."

Mrs. Part came out to her, a demure woman who had been disciplined by years of subtle tranquillity until she had learnt to love it and to wrap herself in it as in a garment.

"I hear you are staying, miss."

Iris Vance's eyes answered the soft voice.

"Yes. A night or two. I shan't be any bother to you."

"Nothing has ever been any bother here, miss."

"I can feel that."

"May I show you your room? I am giving you the amber room."

"Thank you."

Looking out of the window of the amber room, Iris Vance could see the gardens, the river, the meadows, Mr. Archibald's world; and her grief for him was very real, though it differed from her mother's grief. It was that other sacred relationship that had brought Mr. Archibald Kesteven into her life, to be to her friend and father. He had taught her much, what to love and what to hate, and she had spoken the truth when she had said to Anthony that her memory of his father was unsmirched by thought of graveyard favours. Kesteven had given in his lifetime, and she had loved him for the wisdom of such giving. He had always said, "I shall be no bone for dogs to fight over."

The window overlooked the bridge, and she was suddenly aware of a figure crossing the bridge; a second figure followed with a suit-case.

"He is going away!"

She was surprised and she was glad, and she watched a car appear and carry Mr. Anthony Kesteven Londonwards. Someone knocked at her door.

"Come in."

Mrs. Part entered with a bowl of exquisite roses.

"Mr. Kesteven's compliments, miss, but he has to go to town."

"So I see."

"Dinner is at eight o'clock, Miss Vance. Will that suit you?"

"Excellently. How kind of you to bring those roses."

She wandered about the garden till dusk fell, and at eight the deep-throated bell called her to the oak room, where she sat at Mr. Archibald's table and in his chair and was waited upon by his servants. They waited upon her as though she had sat there for years, or as though the dead man himself were present. They neither stared nor showed surprise, though she knew that her sudden appearance must have surprised them. Mr. Archibald Kesteven's presence still dominated the house, and the winking candles on the table might have been stirred by his breath.

Later she went out into the loggia to meet the full moon. She saw the sheeted silver of the river and the fields, the trees splashed with soft light, the abruptness of their shadows. The night was extraordinarily still, and yet she was conscious of an increasing restlessness. She felt as though something were going to happen. A sense of suspense quivered in the moonlight.

Presently she entered the house and, climbing the broad staircase, found herself in the gallery, with its armour and its cabinets and chests, its dim tapestries and pictures. She knew which was the door of Mr. Archibald's room, for it was opposite her own, and some impulse made her open the door and enter the room. Moonlight, slanting through the window, fell upon the four-post bed and made a whiteness under the high canopy. A sheet had been stretched over the bed, and beneath the sheet a pile of folded blankets gave the ghastly impression of a figure.

She shivered slightly and closed the door.

"How cold death is."

She went to her own room, switched on the light and began to undress, though sleep felt very far away from her. Her thoughts were held by the great bed in the room across the corridor. How still the house was, still as the night! Through the window she could see an aspen tree silver grey in the moonlight, and even the aspen leaves did not move.

Wakefulness possessed her. An hour passed, and yet another hour, and she lay and listened and watched the moonlight on the aspen tree. She was aware of an incipient drowsiness, and then, sud-

denly, she was wide awake and listening with startled intentness. She had heard a door open and close, and a moment later she was listening to another sound that hurried her back to the memory of a child's night terror. Yes, she remembered that very same sound, the peculiar shuffling of the Oriental slippers the dead man had worn when he had come in her room to take her in his arms and comfort her. Twelve years ago! And again she was listening to the shuffling of those slippers up and down the great gallery, a familiar echo out of the past. She sat up in bed, and as she did so she heard the handle of her door turned.

She was not conscious of any fear, but rather of intense curiosity. She had a feeling that what was happening had been meant to happen, and that it was part of the past and part of the future. He came into the room and stood at the foot of her bed, wrapped in his old green and gold silk dressing-gown. She saw his hair all silvery against the moonlight.

He was looking at her. She fancied that she detected that elusive and half mischievous smile.

"Mr. Kest."

She stretched out a hand and uttered the name of affection she had used as a child.

He appeared to bend his head. He was speaking, and the strange part of it was that though she heard no words uttered, she understood all that he was saying.

"I wished you to come, and you felt my wish and came. To-morrow send for Holt, my lawyer. Tell him to look inside the quiver of the lead Cupid on the third pillar going down the steps. Good-bye, dear child. Love has meant very much to me. Tell her that, because of it, I am happy."

He stretched out a hand as though blessing her, turned, and seemed to melt into the moonlight.

Next morning, before breakfast, she sent off a man with a telegram to Mr. Holt, and her sense of "the presence" was such that she did not go near the figure of Cupid poised, bow in hand, upon his pillar. Standing in the sunlight of a still September morning, with dew upon everything, and trees glimmering in the white river mist, she knew

that she had not dreamed. The Master of Kesteven had had a message for her. It was not by chance that she had felt the impulse that had brought her to the island.

At eleven o'clock Iris was sitting in the loggia, when she heard the sound of a car, and five minutes later she was rising to meet Mr. Archibald's lawyer. He was amazingly prompt, and she remarked upon his promptness.

"How good of you to come at once. My telegram did not go till eight."

He looked at her questioningly.

"Telegram?"

"Yes; I sent one to your office."

"But, my dear young lady, I have not been to my office. I came back to town last night, after seeing your mother and hearing that you were here. This morning—"

They looked at each other, and she was aware of something critical and mistrustful in his eyes.

"I have a message for you, Mr. Holt."

"From Mr. Anthony Kesteven?"

"No. He left here soon after I arrived. The message is from his father."

"My dear young lady!"

His scepticism was less convincing than his tone implied.

"You may not believe me," she said, and told him what had happened; "but the proof is waiting for us. Will you go alone, or shall I come with you?"

"By all means come with me," he said.

But at the top of the steps he paused, and with a little restraining gesture kept her beside him.

"One moment. Do you mind answering one or two questions?"

"Of course."

"Do you expect me to find anything in the quiver of the lead Cupid?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"And have you any idea as to what that something might be?"

"Not the smallest idea."

"You saw Mr. Anthony Kesteven yesterday?"

"For five or ten minutes."

"And he told you nothing of his father's affairs?"

"Nothing. But he did tell me that he meant to sell the house and everything in it."

"Ah! He told you that!"

She became aware of the fact that Mr.

Holt was restraining an increasing excitement. He adjusted his glasses, and, descending the steps, stopped by the figure of the leaden Cupid. Reaching up, he discovered that he would need a chair, and one of the oak chairs was fetched from the loggia. Iris Vance steadied it while Mr. Holt climbed up and peered into the love god's quiver.

"Ha!" he said. "Ha!"

She was watching his face, and its excitement was obvious. He inserted a finger and thumb and extracted a little wad of leaves. He peered. A sudden smile crisped his excited face. He dipped again and drew out a roll of parchment.

"Eureka!"

He was down off the chair, and standing in the middle of the stairway, he unfolded the document with eager and fumbling hands. She saw the leaves fluttering as he turned them over, his lips pursed up, his head on one side. He appeared to be searching for some particular page, and when he found it he uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Bless my soul! I thought so."

He was reading, and she did not interrupt him. She was aware of a look of solemnity stealing over his face, and when he had read all that he needed to read, he removed his glasses and stood staring at the river.

"Extraordinary!"

And then he seemed to remember the girl. He turned and, with a smile, gave her a slight bow.

"I always felt that Mr. Archibald Kesteven would keep his sense of humour to the last. This, my dear young lady, is Mr. Archibald's will. The codicil

attached to it is the thing of importance. We had been unable to find his will. The letter attached here explains his very peculiar motives.

He paused, tapping the document with his glasses.

"Please observe that this will had been concealed in a place where it might very soon perish. Exposed to the rain, it would have rotted, become illegible. It was intended to be discovered soon or not at all. He actually states in his letter that it was his wish that the person to discover it, if it was to be discovered, should be you."

The same thought showed in the eyes of both.

"He did not decide till after his death!"

Mr. Holt nodded.

"Quite incredible; and yet it would almost seem as though he had been waiting, listening, watching."

"But what is the significance of the will?"

"Mr. Anthony Kesteven is left the sum of ten thousand pounds."

"Yes."

"Kesteven House and island and all Mr. Archibald's estate is left to you."

"To me?"

Mr. Holt was able to gauge the sincerity of her astonishment.

"Yes, to you. And he gives his reasons. He leaves you a free hand. Listen to what he says: 'I think that she will remember that what little good I did, I did in secret. I held out a hand to those who were too proud to ask. I give her power. Let her be proud in the using of it, and gentle to those who have pride.'"



Two Fine Books

Sheila Kaye-Smith

The End of the House of Alard

This new novel by "one of the very few novelists now writing who have quite definitely achieved greatness," was received with acclamation by the Press.

Arnold Bennett

Riceyman Steps

Mr. Bennett once again describes with sympathy and insight the romance that beautifies the lives of even the most commonplace people.

Each



Cassell's

London

The MYSTERIOUS

Mr. BROWN

By

WARWICK DEEPING

WHITE LION SQUARE knew him as Mr. Brown. He was very poor, or looked it. He occupied a top floor room at No. 9 on the side of the Square that faced north.

In the days of the Regency, White Lion Square had been solid and almost fashionable, but during London's progress westwards the Square had grown shabbier and shabbier until it had become submerged and surreptitious. It housed all sorts and conditions of obscure people. Even its sixpenny doctor had deserted it.

Mr. Brown came and went, a tall, Roman-nosed man, lean and fortyish. His shabbiness was almost too thorough; his black trousers were patched so publicly that they seemed to threaten disaster, and his short black jacket was frayed at the cuffs and elbows. He wore an old bowler hat that was utterly out of date, but his white collar was clean.

Usually he carried a brown-paper

parcel very badly tied up, and this parcel was as mysterious as Mr. Brown.

He looked like a broken-down clerk, and yet—in spite of his leanness—he had the air of having enough to eat. His voice was cultured, almost too cultured for White Lion Square and its prejudices, yet there was nothing unfriendly or stand-offish about Mr. Brown. If his neighbours were inclined to eye him askance, he disarmed them with a kind of easy, blue-eyed candour that made him seem even more aloof.

"What's the game, guv'nor?"

Mr. Brown gave the Square to understand that he was in search of a job, and that jobs were elusive.

THE Square was free and easy. It quarrelled and swore and laughed and fought and gossiped and was greasy. It teemed with children whose faces never remained washed. It could be petty and jealous and generous. It gossiped about Mr. Brown and his mysteries.

The Mysterious Mr. Brown

Bill Bloxom, a Covent Garden porter, and the Square's pet tough, would have it that Mr. Brown was "a bloody nark." Mr. Bloxom appeared to dislike Mr. Brown; he disliked anything that suggested the soul of the toff.

"Old Ma Clutterbuck says 'e scribbles in a book, and keeps it locked up in a bag."

"P'raps 'e's a bookie's tout."

"Sixpenny tips? Not likely."

Mr. Bloxom's hostility precipitated a crisis which surprised both Mr. Bloxom and White Lion Square. It happened on a Saturday night when Mr. Bloxom was full of beer and bravado, and when the various doorways were occupied by interested ladies whose glances did not kill. Mr. Brown and Mr. Bloxom met on the pavement outside No. 9, for Mr. Bloxom had been waiting for Mr. Brown, and Mr. Bloxom's beer and bellicosity was ready to spill itself upon the flagstones.

"Hi, what's the (sanguinary) game?"

He lurched up to Mr. Brown, who was innocent and polite.

"What game?"

"That's what I'm askin' yer."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Oh, you don't understand, yer blasted, broken-darn toff."

MR. BROWN did understand that Mr. Bloxom was in drink and determined to be offensive, for he had seen Mr. Bloxom in action on other Saturday nights. It was Mr. Bloxom's boast that there wasn't a man in the Square whom he couldn't thrash, and as a matter of fact he had thrashed all those who had dared to question his superiority.

Mr. Brown found himself looking at a large fist held within six inches of his nose.

"'Ere, you can get out of this, see! We don't like the look of yer."

Mr. Brown smiled. He realised that he was up against a crisis—and this silly brute's mutton-fist. Either he would have to bolt back into No. 9, and leave Mr. Bloxom to swagger and shout, or Mr. Bloxom would have to be dealt with.

Mr. Brown hung his brown-paper parcel on the railings, and placed his bowler hat on one of the spikes, and

quite quietly he said to Mr. Bloxom: "You're a drunken, brawling beast, and a nuisance to everybody. Take that."

Mr. Bloxom took it unexpectedly, full on the flesh of his democratic nose, and White Lion Square rushed to enjoy the sensation. It had not expected Mr. Brown to show fight, and it was still more surprised at his efficiency as a fighting-man.

He could box; he was as quick on his feet as a boy. He knocked Mr. Bloxom this way, and he knocked him that, until the bully of White Lion Square lay in the gutter and was sick.

Someone bent over him.

"Licked at last. Serve you bloomin' well right."

Mr. Brown recovered his hat and his parcel, smiled in a friendly sort of way at his neighbours, and made a characteristic remark:

"Perhaps—after this—our Saturday nights will be a little more peaceful."

Mr. Bloxom's wife, who was a fit mate for her husband, screamed angrily at Mr. Brown.

"Yer licked 'im drunk. You couldn't lick 'im sober."

Mr. Brown raised his hat to her.

"Apologies. Persuade him to remain sober next Saturday, madam, and I will see what I can do for you."

The crowd laughed, and gave Mr. Brown a little cheer. The Square was fed-up with the Bloxoms, who were known—at a discreet distance—as Beery Bill and Big Bertha.

NOW, there was a portion of White Lion Square that considered itself a little wealthier and more select than its neighbours, and perhaps with reason, and to this upper circle belonged Mrs. Colefax, who owned a small shop in Conduit Street and who let lodgings in White Lion Square. Not that Mrs. Colefax counted much. She was a pale woman who twittered and who never gave away a sixpence. It was her daughter, Polly, who mattered, for Polly Colefax was the delight and the despair of all the amorous males in White Lion Square.

Polly was a person with a large mouth and bright brown eyes, a

retroussé nose, a perfect complexion, and teeth that were made to bite into an apple. Life was Polly's apple. She had an immense appetite for it with all the vigour of her plump young body. She did not belong to the new, flat-chested, boy-faced sisterhood; and, as one of her hopeless swains had said, "She ain't a match-stick. Somethin' there to get hold of. Wish it was me."

Polly Colefax was an independent young person. She had amused herself with various vocations. She had been a Nippy, and a lift attendant, and a factory hand, and a lady at large on the dole. For the moment she was free, and troubling the souls of White Lion Square with a display of fancy frocks.

Married women pulled long faces.

"Where did she get 'em? That's what I should like to know."

"Oh, well, yer can guess, Mrs. Smith, can't yer?"

"Yes—I can guess!"

Mr. Brown and Miss Colefax had passed each other in the Square; but shortly after Mr. Brown's chastising of Mr. Bloxom, Miss Colefax began to smile upon the victor, and Polly's smile was as frank as her philosophy. The smile said: "Hallo, old thing; I rather like you. What about it? Stop and talk."

Mr. Brown had to raise his hat to that smile. "Good morning, Miss Colefax."

And Polly almost winked at him. Perfect gentleman—in spite of his shabbiness. And mysterious!

For though Polly lived with a twittering miser of a mother, she was essentially romantic. She went regularly to the Pictures, and had fallen to Valentino and Ronald Coleman, and to others. Her peach had a bloom on it; and having observed the unusualness of Mr. Brown, she was sure that he was not what he seemed.

"Nice morning, isn't it?"

"Perfect."

"Just right for the Park."

Mr. Brown had moments of shyness. Miss Colefax was wearing one of her smart frocks, and it seemed to Mr. Brown unlikely that so jocund and vital a young woman would wish to parade

in public with a sublimated scarecrow.

"So you walk in the Park?"

She tilted a cheeky chin at him.

"Don't you?"

WELL, yes, he did, but he wasn't exactly clad for a public parade, and he said so, and Miss Colefax glimmered her eyes at him, and gave him to understand that the Park was for all. She said: "I know a thing or two. You've got us guessing."

Mr. Brown fell, for in fact she was a very attractive little person, and quite unlike the gentlewomen he had met elsewhere. She was so pungently alive, a strong little savage, and yet not so savage as she seemed. They mounted a red 'bus, and sitting together above on a front seat up, drove as far as the Marble Arch.

They entered the Park; but to Mr. Brown the Park became quite another place in the presence of Polly. It was like a huge and fascinating playground full of funny children and people and things. She had a roguish eye and an irrepressible tongue, and Mr. Brown began to find life surprisingly fresh and amusing.

"Look at the corpses."

She referred to sundry prone and shabby figures on the grass, and Mr. Brown nodded.

"Yes, I have been one of the corpses."

She flashed a knowing look at him.

"Just pretending. You don't kid me!"

They sat on a seat and watched Mr. Lansbury's new Lido, and the boats going to and fro with more energy than skill. Polly seemed to have a name for everything and everybody, and Mr. Brown found himself laughing. Yes, life was really a very funny business, and he was able to think of the original Brown as a man who had become bored with being good. Polly was not good; she was Life.

They observed each other like two children conscious of mutual attraction, and not concealing the implication.

"Say, you did give Big Bill a dusting."

Mr. Brown smiled. He was pleased.

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He was about to explain that once upon a time he had been a notable heavy-weight up at—— But he checked himself. He was modest.

"Oh, Mr. Bloxom was a little—officious and rather drunk."

She laughed.

"He won't bother you again. Blooming bully. Guess he got a tummy-full."

Her language should have shocked him, but it didn't. Somehow he found it refreshing. She was like the Bible, a Ruth-Bathsheba-Mary Magdalene creature without the faded refinements of a middle-class niceness. She had views upon things and a vigorous and vivid way of expressing them, and a scheme of values that combined the romantic and the real.

MR. BROWN did not suffer from that dreadful urge to improve people; his hobby was to study them as they were, and he knew that it is possible to suffer severely from the boredom of too much beauty and "culture." Polly's appetite for the apple of life refreshed him, and especially as she had eaten the greenest of her apples.

White Lion Square watched the development of this curious comradeship, or as much of it as it was permitted to observe. The Square supposed that if Polly was allowing herself to vamp Mr. Brown, Mr. Brown's pockets could not be as empty of cash as his clothes suggested.

The Square wronged Miss Colefax. Better a greedy child than a greedy woman, and Polly was not quite either. She could flatten her nose against the window of life, and exclaim "Oo-er, ain't it lovely! Wish it was mine." But she could drag herself away from the window, and laugh, and indulge in a little philosophy. "We won't have a new Rolls every day, Phil."

Mr. Philip Brown she nowadays called Phil, and they were learning to play their London game together. Polly invented the game. You walked down Oxford Street and Bond Street and along Piccadilly, and on days when you were feeling less expensive you were satisfied with Shaftesbury Avenue. The game was a game of windows.

"I think I'll have mink, Phil."

"Mink? Righto; mink it shall be."

And they would pretend to march in and buy that fabulous coat, and Mr. Brown would go into raptures over her appearance in it, and she would strut off down the street like a little madam, and burst into laughter.

"Aren't we a couple of kids!"

But there were other windows, and Mr. Brown and Miss Colefax purchased an extraordinary collection of luxuries—motor-cars and dressing-cases and precious stones, and silk stockings and gold and silver shoes and Paris models, and bath-salts and perfumes and hats. Nor were the purchases wholly feminine. Mr. Brown had his share, and Polly assigned to him silk dressing-gowns and gorgeous pyjamas, and an opera-hat, and glacé-kid shoes, and white waistcoats, and fluffy and colourful pull-overs. Fair does. The game was a half-and-half concern.

For Polly was a generous creature, and possibly it was her innate generosity that made Mr. Brown appreciate her as rather lovable. When they indulged themselves at a picture-house she insisted on taking her turn at paying, and there were occasions when she presided as hostess at a Lyons' tea-table.

Mr. Brown had noticed her gazing critically at his clothes.

"Don't you think you might have a new pair of trousers, Phil?"

Mr. Brown thought so too.

"Yes, they are a bit miffy, aren't they? I might manage it."

She hinted that there was no need for him to study professional appearances with her, and that she understood that there were reasons for his shabbiness.

"You're not so broke as you look, Phil."

HE wasn't. He purchased a new pair of trousers and a soft hat; and when the young men of White Lion Square observed this transformation they grew enviously sarcastic. Polly had got off with the old toff, but Mr. Brown was not so old that he could be treated with public disrespect. He was a tough.

Miss Colefax on her part had disrespectful things to say about the young men of White Lion Square. She called them "bottles of ginger-beer, all gas and not much ginger." The fashionable pose was that of a Red Russian ruffianism that grew very pink when the police were in evidence.

Miss Colefax was full of scorn. "They'd like to be thought desperate characters, and they haven't the guts to be real bad. They might chuck a few bricks and then bunk when the bobbies came for them."

In some subtle fashion she gave Mr. Brown to understand that she believed him to be a desperate fellow in disguise, but however desperate he might be he would still deserve the epithet of decent; that is to say, he was some sort of picturesque outlaw who was bad because of the thrill of the adventure.

He was perplexed and amused, and one evening on a shady seat he asked her the inevitable question.

"What do you think I am, Polly?"

She looked at him knowingly and alluringly in the dusk.

"I'm not giving away any secrets."

"Well, have a guess."

She tilted her chin at him.

"You're a flash burglar, that's what you are."

He was astonished, and perhaps a little flattered.

"What—a sort of Raffles?"

"You've said it. Oh, you needn't give yourself away to me. And I shouldn't give you away if you did."

At that moment there was born in Mr. Brown's brain a fantastic and romantic idea.

"Ever met a real burglar, Polly?"

"Not the swank sort, the real lad who plays a lone game."

Mr. Brown smiled.

"Yes, it's an exciting job. You've got to be smart and patient. You've got to study the ground for days or weeks."

She sidled closer.

"Have you got a job in view now, Phil?"

"As a matter of fact, I have."

"A big one?"

"Yes, biggish; a place in the country."

"How lovely! Look here, be a sport, let me come."

"You?"

"Yes; I'll dress up. I'm pretty fly. Just you and me. Gosh, I'd love it!"

He eyed her steadily.

"I believe you would. But what about your morals, Polly? What about the particular commandment?"

She took him quite seriously.

"You only pinch stuff, Phil, from the toffs. Besides—they're insured. What about the financial bugs, and the big noises in Fleet Street? Don't they do some pinching from the public, and do it safely?"

"Oh, possibly."

"I wouldn't pinch from those who couldn't afford it. I don't want to hurt anybody."

"I don't believe you do. But supposing things went wrong?"

"I'll risk it. Do be a sport, Phil."

Actually he kissed her, and said: "You priceless bit of mischief! I'll think it over."

THAT was how Mr. Brown was inspired to go down and burgle the house of Philip Brandon, Esq., of Thorn Hill, in the county of Berkshire. Mr. Philip Brandon was a gentleman of private means and of considerable taste in old furniture and pictures; a widower, whose establishment was controlled by Miss Portia Brandon, his sister.

Gossip that was sympathetic to Philip Brandon averred that the gentleman had enjoyed no luck with his women, for Mrs. Brandon had been a good woman with a polished tip to her nose, and had suffered from certain congestions. Miss Brandon was even better than the wife had been—a righteous virago who belonged to societies for the prevention of this and the prevention of that.

Mr. Brandon's neighbours were not surprised that he travelled considerably and was seen but spasmodically at Thorn Hill.

Mr. Brown purchased a second-hand car from a garage in the Marylebone Road. It was very second-hand, but suitable for the adventure. He also purchased a pair of spare registration plates, and spent an evening painting

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false numbers upon them. He felt like a boy on the edge of some filibustering adventure. He spoke mysteriously to Miss Colefax. He disappeared from White Lion Square for two nights.

Polly hoodwinked the Square.

"Phil's gone to try for a job at Brighton. Quite a nice job, too. Personally I haven't any quarrel with Brighton."

For she presumed that Mr. Bloxom was suffering from suppressed malevolence, and might think it his business to give a tip to the police with regard to the disappearance of the mysterious Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown returned, and White Lion Square was told that he was one of the six applicants who had been selected for further consideration. Yes, it was quite a nice job at a wine and spirit merchant's. That appealed to White Lion Square.

To Miss Colefax he said: "I've got it all fixed. We sail on Wednesday night at half-past ten. Meet me outside the Tube station—Gower Street."

"Can I dress up?"

"No. We shall look much more innocent if you go as you are."

It was an exciting occasion; a fine night with a full moon shining; and Mr. Brown's second-hand car travelled countrywards with a shabby docility that was utterly undistinguished. Mr. Brown wore a floppy hat and an overcoat, and Miss Colefax's head was just like any other head that can be seen beside a male hat in a mass-production Chummy-Cambridge.

Somewhere between Egham and Ascot Mr. Brown pulled into a lane, and while Polly acted as scout he changed the car's registration plates. They shared a little refreshment in the car, and Mr. Brown showed to Miss Colefax the black silk masks which were to be worn.

Polly was delighted.

"Me too?"

"Of course. If a man happened to see your face he might not be likely to forget it."

THIS was true gallantry, and Mr. Brown was properly rewarded, and they drove on towards Thorn Hill, Mr. Brown choosing a

devious and unfrequented route. They passed through a village which had gone to sleep, and about half a mile beyond it Mr. Brown turned the car into a lane. He drove about three hundred yards up the lane and parked the car in a green and dark recess under the heavy shade of a big beech tree. He switched off the lights.

"Now then—no talking, and keep close to me."

Miss Colefax hung on his arm, and felt an overcoat pocket bulging with the weapons of the burglar. They crossed a park, and Thorn Hill House loomed up amid its yews and cedars. Mr. Brown was wearing crêpe-soled shoes. He paused under one of the cedars to put on his mask.

"I think you'd better stay here, Polly."

"Oh, I say, I want to see the whole show."

"Well, you can come as far as the house. I'm going in through one of the windows."

Mr. Brown's invasion seemed simplicity itself. The catch of the window he selected had been left unfastened, and Mr. Brown raised the lower sash and slipped in. He paused with a hand on Polly's arm. He whispered:

"You stay here and keep a look-out. If things go wrong by any chance, cut and run—see? Never mind about me."

She whispered in his ear:

"I'm a sticker, Phil. I shan't quit."

HE disappeared; and, enjoying every moment of the thrill, she sat on the window-sill and listened. Mr. Brown had switched on an electric torch. He appeared to be curiously familiar with the internal arrangements of Thorn Hill, for, without hesitation, he made his way up a short flight of stairs and into a little room off the hall which was used as a cloak-room. In it stood a safe, and Mr. Brown produced a bunch of keys, and, opening the safe, extracted two or three smallish parcels.

He had stuffed them into his pockets and reclosed the safe when he was disturbed by a slight sound. Pulling out an automatic pistol he sidled out into the hall, and began to explore it with

his torch. Something rubbed against his legs—a cat, a black cat, but the omen was fallacious, for suddenly a glare of light filled the hall.

Mr. Brown blinked, and then he saw a figure in a pink dressing-gown standing by an oak armoire. Miss Portia Brandon, wakeful and fussy, had heard some sound and come down to investigate it.

She did not scream. She spoke in a tight, severe voice.

"What are you doing here?"

Obviously Miss Brandon was a woman of determination, and Mr. Brown pointed his pistol at her. He spoke in a hoarse voice.

"Make a sound and I'll shoot."

Her retort was instant.

"Don't be silly. The noise would rouse the house. And put down that pistol—at once!"

Mr. Brown seemed to hesitate, and then he did a rather surprising thing. He crossed the hall, and, opening a door in the panelling, disclosed a huge cupboard. He addressed the lady, still in that hoarse voice:

"Step inside—please."

Miss Brandon stared at him. She saw him take an Oriental dagger from a trophy of arms that hung on the wall. But how had this ruffian come to know of the existence of that cupboard?

Mr. Brown repeated his invitation:

"Step inside please, or I'll cut your throat. Don't scream."

And promptly—as though to flout him—Miss Brandon began to scream. She shouted: "Hawkins! Hawkins!" And Mr. Brown, with sudden ferocity, put both pistol and dagger aside on a table, laid hands upon the lady, and without ceremony bundled her into the cupboard. He turned the key on her, recovered his pistol and fled.

He found Polly breathless at the window.

"I heard someone scream."

"Yes, the old woman. I've locked her up. Come on, kid, run."

They ran, but Polly asked questions.

"Any luck, Phil?"

"Yes, I've got the loot. Opened the safe with a master-key."

"Oh, splendid!"

They reached the car, and tumbled in, and Mr. Brown extracted the car

from the lane and drove quite tamely through the sleeping village.

"Mustn't appear in a hurry, kid."

They were hailed by no minion of the law, and when the car poked its nose into the main road, Mr. Brown let her have it. They made tracks for London.

BUT, strange to relate, Miss Brandon remained in the cupboard till seven o'clock in the morning. No one heard her shouts and thumpings; and, at seven, Mr. Hawkins, the butler, came downstairs and released her. He wore a face of polite astonishment.

"How did you get in there, madam?"

Miss Brandon called Hawkins a fool. The house had been burgled, and six stupid servants had heard nothing.

"You surprise me, madam!"

Miss Brandon's fingers twitched. She very much wanted to box Hawkins' ears.

SHORTLY after the burgling of Thorn Hill House, Mr. Brown disappeared for a few days. It might be said that he had gone into retreat to meditate upon life, and to estimate the various values and chances of the great adventure. Nor did he return to take up his lodgings in No. 9 White Lion Square, but he called at Mrs. Colefax's and was seen to walk out with her daughter. He was quite well dressed.

Mr. Brown and Polly sat on a seat in St. James's Park, and Mr. Brown explained the situation.

"Fact is, Polly, I think of retiring. It would be good for my health if I went abroad for awhile. They haven't caught me on that last job, and one ought to finish on a high note. I think I shall do Europe, and then go and photograph wild animals in Africa."

Polly looked pensive.

"You're talking like a rich toff, Phil."

He smiled.

"Well, Polly, I've been putting by for years. I've been a bit of a speculator, too, and my last scoop was on the big side. I'm a man of means, my dear."

"It's all very nice for you, Phil."

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He put an arm round her.

"Well, it might be very nice for both of us. What about Paris, and Monte, and a month on the Lido? Real mink—this time. I can manage it. I have a notion that you and I could get something out of life."

Polly was not given to blushing.

"Oh, Phil, you don't mean it, do you?"

"Of course I do. What about going and getting spliced? It will be a bit of a business fixing up a passport for you, but we'll manage it somehow."

So the mysterious Mr. Brown and Miss Colefax were married, but Mr. Brown was married in the name of Brandon, he having explained to Polly that the name of Brown was an alias. And Polly had a marvellous week's shopping, and enjoyed every minute of it, and insisted upon Mr. Brandon buying himself all sorts of things that he really did not need.

"Fair does, Phil. Half-and-half."

Mr. Brandon took his wife to see a solemn but pleasant-eyed gentleman in Gray's Inn, and Polly had to sign documents, and behaved with absolute decorum.

Mr. Brandon had a few words alone with the lawyer.

"You'll do the passport for me. Oh, yes, it's quite all right. Say you've known her a month, old man."

The lawyer looked gravely at Mr. Brandon.

"A child of the people."

"You may think me an almighty fool, Maine, but I'm not such a fool. I've got a live wife. Keep it quiet until I give you the tip."

SO Polly and Phil went on their great adventure and enjoyed it hugely, and went on enjoying it in Africa and America and Japan. Thorn Hill House remained sacred to Miss Brandon; and when she was questioned as to the movements of her brother, all that she could say was that Philip Brandon was abroad. He had

developed certain eccentricities; he had abandoned Thorn Hill and its correct culture, and taken up the study of Sociology.

Yes, Miss Brandon believed that he had spent two or three years living in strange places in order to assure himself how other people lived. So far as she knew her brother was abroad.

He remained abroad, and unbored. Miss Brandon was unaware of the existence of Polly, and had she had the affair explained to her she would have seen in it nothing but male folly. Philip, a man of culture, married to a crude little creature, a little animal who could not speak Oxford English nor feed herself decently in public! Well, really! Of course some sordid climax was inevitable. Philip would be bored by the creature, or she would make a ghastly fool of him.

But it did not turn out in that way, and Mr. Brandon, the sociologist, proved himself just as wise and mischievous as Mr. Brown the mock burglar.

Some two years later Miss Brandon received a letter from Messrs. Maine & Pearson, of Gray's Inn, in which they begged to inform her that their client was selling Thorn Hill. Miss Brandon was very angry, but being a woman of means she could well afford a residence of her own. She had to afford it. She took a flat in Chelsea and became an active and virulent anti-something.

Mr. and Mrs. Philip Brandon, after wandering all over the world together, bought a place in Surrey and spent much time flying their own private aeroplane. But in due course these aerial stunts had to be discarded, for Polly bore Phil a son, and after the son two daughters.

Mr. Brandon nicknamed the children "Pip, Squeak & Wilfred." He continued to be the sort of over-grown lad whom Miss Colefax had taught to laugh. Life was a huge joke, and he continued to enjoy it with Polly.

DECEMBER 1927

Pharaoh

by

WARWICK DEEPING

THE affair between Benjafield and Carden began on the very first day.

Some forty people disembarked from the Nile boat to mount donkeys, a various crowd that climbed the river bank to the shade of the palms where Egypt waited for the barbarians. There was much jabbering and yelling, much dust, many flies. Benjafield, wielding a fly-whisk, and regarding his fellow travellers and the Egyptians with an air of cold and condescending amusement, observed the peach of the party, and prepared for annexation. He was the sort of man who annexed things by reason of his superior complacency, his height, his French accent, and his handsome but rather ram-like head.

There was chaos: boys scuffled; donkeys were pulled this way and that. Donkey-men addressed each other in language that suggested the unmentionableness of their respective mothers. The dragoman of the Nile boat—*Isis*—proceeded with imperturbable deliberation to get his convoy mounted.

An urchin in a filthy smock plucked at Benjafield's sleeve.

"Mister — Mister — good donkey, good boy!"

Benjafield switched the boy across the face with his fly-whisk.

"*Imshi!*"

He was observing the girl in the fawn-coloured breeches and pale yellow jumper. She was tall, aloof, with a slightly swarthy disdain. She, too, was being pestered by brown impudence with flashing teeth and hair of crinkly blackness.

"Miss, me poor boy: no mother, no father, no wife——"

She smiled upon him.

"And no handkerchief."

Benjafield heard and smirked. He liked

the poise of her swarthy superciliousness. At least—he assumed her to be supercilious. Ecstasies—especially middle-class ecstasies—can be so *bête*.

A donkey was brought to him—a big grey beast in charge of a youth; and he mounted and settled his stirrups. The lady was mounting a grey ass; she rode astride. In the dust and the disorder under the palms there were whoops and whackings, and exclamations from half-alarmed ladies. The rout set off up the dirty street of a very dirty village, jostling and jolting and bumping, an unseemly parade, with joy on the faces of all the mischievous boys.

The social ice melts very rapidly amid such surroundings. Benjafield saw the nameless lady ahead of him making a graceful progress, erect and serene. There were riders who turned their toes out or turned their toes in, who clutched at saddles and appealed to the young devils with sticks. "Not so fast! Go slower." And the young devils grinned and surreptitiously twisted the tails of the donkeys. Benjafield, no novice at the game, touched his youth with the fly-whisk, displayed a ten-piastre piece, and pointed out the girl in fawn and yellow.

"Understand English, young fellah?"

"Me spik English, Mister."

"The lady on the white donkey, Mister and Miss."

The lad grinned. He knew, and Benjafield knew, that though a man may be the master of his fate, he may not be master of his moke. The ways of asses are peculiar. The lord and tyrant, the Pharaoh of donkeydom is the donkey-boy.

The youth cut the grey ass across the hind-quarters with his stick, and Benjafield forged forward through the jiggling crowd; but at

a critical moment another donkey, ridden by a short, square, laughing person in a topee and white drill, cut in and stumbled under the very nose of Benjafield's ass. The white figure went over its donkey's head into an assortment of dust and debris. And Benjafield was involved in the disaster. He, too, went over an ass's head into a moist patch under a mud wall.

The two sat and stared at each other.

"Damn you and your donkey!"

"Sorry."

One man laughed, the other snarled. Boys jabbered. The two donkeys looked demurely indifferent. Also, the white ass ridden by Miss Mandeville had chosen to about-turn and provide its rider with a view of the spectacle. She saw the two men getting up with the remnants of a laugh and a snarl. Benjafield had a wet patch and a bitter dignity. Carden needed dusting by his donkey-boy, but his temper was in order.

She laughed. She could not help laughing. She caught the eyes of both: two eyes that glared, and two eyes that smiled.

She had to say something.

"These occasions do provide us with informal introductions, don't they?"

Jack Carden was readjusting his topee.

"Like life—up and down."

Benjafield, feeling damp and furious, mounted his ass and lit a cigarette.

"I'll be obliged if you'll keep behind me."

"Oh, anywhere you please," said Carden; "back view, front view: it's all the same to me."

So it began, and was immediately continued between fields of bean and of barley, Benjafield ranging himself on one side of the lady, Carden on the other. They would have been antipathetic without any such inspiration: Carden, the man who did things; Benjafield—the superior person who talked and wrote about the things that other people did. Artist and critic rode together with their fair lady between them, and disliked each other whole-heartedly. And she, neither smiling nor frowning, held the balance between them, quickly amused by the boyishness of the one and the too-damned-cleverness of the other. The enthusiast and the cynic were bracketed, with the superior person feeling himself so much higher in the saddle and pushing spicules of ice into the skin of the *gaillard* fool.

Carden remarked on the smell of the bean-fields in flower.

"Always makes me feel romantic, you know."

"Like the cuckoo."

"Yes; like the cuckoo."

Benjafield giped at him. He allowed that the smell of the bean-flower was the only good smell in Egypt; but Carden was a little out of date: Browning, and green mush, and—"to be in England now that April's here"!

Meanwhile, Benjafield's donkey-lad, being a child of some cunning, gave Carden's ass a cut across the hindquarters with his stick, and Carden was out of action for two minutes, bumping vigorously some fifty yards ahead beside a German lady who quivered like a raspberry jelly. Benjafield grinned and dropped another ten-piastre piece at the feet of his donkey-boy.

"The buccaneer's gone ahead after the pink bubble."

Miss Mandeville was observing two little green birds sitting on a telegraph wire.

"One prefers a quest," she said.

"I suppose you never watch birds."

"Only when I shoot 'em. Confound you!"

And he, too, went forward, for Carden's boy had seen that silver piece passed, and, grasping the inspiration, had laid his stick upon Benjafield's moke. Benjafield cantered forward, meeting Carden once more in control of his mount and returning to his cavaliership. Carden looked ironical; Benjafield stiff—biting on his expletives.

Carden smiled at Norah Mandeville.

"Box and Cox. Excuse me. What between the donkeys and these young devils . . . it's your turn, I think."

She observed him as he manoeuvred beside her.

"No: I go at a stately pace. You see—I have Moses for my guardian."

"So you have. There's some advantage in having an old fellow behind you. He doesn't want to run. Here, you—Mahomed, or Hassan, or whatever your name is . . .!"

He presented his boy with a twenty-piastre piece.

"Talk English. Walkee all the time. Go slow."

The boy showed his white teeth.

"No gallop, Mister?"

"Yes; that's it. Splendid fellow!"

"English good, English ver good," said the boy; "this donkey good donkey. He called 'Whiskysoda.'"

Carden laughed.

"So much for the price of a drink! England, home and whisky! We are known by our tippie."

He caught her sidelong smile.

"Do they mount America on 'Boot-leg' or 'Prohibition'?"

"Both—I presume."

"And Germany?"

"On 'Pilsener.'"

"And Scotland?"

"Oh—on 'Saxpence'!"

Somewhere ahead Benjafield was having trouble with his donkey and running a kind of perfunctory race, neck-and-neck with a fifteen-stone Australian. His lad had gone to his assistance.

Said Norah Mandeville: "Asses fail to understand sarcasm"; and Carden's eyes twinkled.

"But do they? I'm an ass—of sorts."

"Perhaps Balaam's?"

"That's nice of you. By the way, have you studied the visitors' list?"

"Casually. I came across a Carden."

"That's me."

"You didn't build Holmwood House, by any chance?"

"I did: for Sir Geoffrey Mandeville."

"My uncle."

"Sounds like an exclamation! I enjoyed creating that house."

"And my uncle enjoys living in it. How did you manage to make it look so inevitable?"

And Carden blushed.

"Oh, I don't know. Just my flair. You see—I love my job, rather. That helps."

In England John Carden had a growing reputation, and Ivor Benjafield had no reputation at all, which—of—course—was monstrous and illogical. For Benjafield had brains. His aunts had said of him: "Ivor has the brains." He had: only too much so; and a thousand a year of his own, and a cold and nice conceit that could not have been bought by Haroun al Raschid. He had published a volume of essays which no one had read. He had ridden half across Asia and spent six months in Bolshevik Russia, and had written more books, but without applause. And here was this fellow Carden, with his boy's face and his rose-in-the-bud enthusiasm, making five-thousand a year and getting himself talked about as one of the few inspired artists in stone and timber and brick. Carden had his name in "Who's Who"; Benjafield had not. And always the Cardens of this world will be something

of an offence and a mystery to the Benjafields. You might ascribe the success of the Cardens to the false taste of a mushy-headed public; but the success was there, to set the teeth of a Benjafield on edge.

On a Nile steamer life flows slowly, like the river. Intimacies become very obvious. Quarrels may occur, and are soon realised for what they are—impossible. You cannot fight in the thick of a crowd. For twenty days there may be the same old magazines, the same flies, the same people, the same shouting children on the banks, the same donkeys, the same white teeth chewing sugar-cane. There may be limitless Bridge and limitless boredom. You ring for the same Berberine servant with the same hot-water can. There will be sure to be someone who snores, and on a Nile steamer a snore is like the rumblings of Etna. Benjafield had a German next to him who snored till the flimsy, match-board petition trembled. And on the other side of him he had Carden, a Carden who whistled when he towelled himself or brushed his hair. Also, Carden would whistle the same tune—"Sole Mio"—and Benjafield loathed sentimental music.

So, there was between these two a sort of depressed blood-rage, a swirl of mutual antipathies that played around the feet of Norah Mandeville. Carden was much less conscious of the disharmony than was Benjafield. He thought the ram-headed man a supercilious, sarcastic, sneering brute. Benjafield made him feel alert and uncomfortable. He did not know that he made Benjafield feel like an iceberg towering to topple over and squash a bobbing little ship.

Yet they played Bridge together at night in the smoking-room, because Norah played Bridge, and their tacit rivalry was becoming universal. Carden played very bad Bridge, and Benjafield told him so.

"Why on earth didn't you lead me a heart?"

He indulged in elaborate autopsies, dissecting and laying bare the foolishness of Carden's play. He was blandly yet insolently superior.

"You don't appear to have much mental concentration."

It was not the half playful "chipping" that is allowed between men, but deliberate and considered scorn. Carden, puffing at his pipe, took these scoldings with great good temper.

"What the Great Panjandrum says—is."

His good temper was an added offence and an exasperation to Benjafield. If Carden retorted with an air of shy facetiousness, he did it with that eternal and boyish smile. And he had the sympathy of the other players. Benjafield's cold voice was too much like a snarl.

One evening the seemingly impossible happened. Benjafield revoked.

He had Norah for his partner, and when Carden—with a demure shyness—claimed the revoke, she laid her cards down and lit a cigarette. The feud interested her. She was intrigued by the different ways in which these two male birds displayed their plumage.

Benjafield denied the lapse.

"Nonsense!—I never revoke."

Carden, with that boyish smile, persisted in uncovering the lapse and proving it. There was a frosty silence.

Norah looked at Benjafield.

"It's a rather responsible pose—that of infallibility."

The party broke up early. Benjafield disappeared into his cabin, but emerged to discover Carden and Norah leaning over the rail amid-

Benjafield had a rage-storm. He rapped on the partition.

"Do you mind turning off the gramophone?"

His voice was a cold drawl, and Carden countered it cheerfully.

"Sorry! I revoke."

Benjafield made scornful noises with his boots and the cabin furniture, and Carden went to bed feeling good.



ships, watching the moon. Their voices were quietly intimate, and Benjafield re-entered his cabin and slammed the door. Half-an-hour later Carden came to bed and began a soft whistling of "Sole Mio."

With conscious amusement the *Isis* as a whole began to observe the feud and even to abet it. There was dulness aboard; people were suffering from too many tombs and temples; and some had suffered from



The white ass ridden by Miss Mandeville had chosen to about-turn and provide its rider with a view of the spectacle.

too much donkey. It was Colonel Bradshaw who suggested games: an irresponsible "rag," with the victor to be presented with a sixpenny blue scarab, and a fourpenny fly-whisk. A big American, genial and *gaillard*, pushed the project further. "The sacred bug's my boost." So, after dinner, they collected in the "glass-house" for an Olympic display: the men in the arena, the women sitting round on chairs. But it was the cock-fight between Carden and Benjafield that consecrated the evening. Carden won it after three minutes of wobbling and scuffling and concentrated effort. He was short and sturdy and smiling. He

toppled Benjafield over backwards, and it was like the overthrow of an insulted idol.

The tall American, big with laughter, crowned Carden with a wastepaper basket.

"Hail, Pharaoh!"

Benjafield, getting up with an icy smirk, went and stood behind Norah Mandeville's chair.

"I think I'll leave the nursery floor to our little friend."

She answered him over an indifferent shoulder.

"He does play rather nicely. It's quite an art."

That there could be anything tragic in the affair was not to be thought of. When two men of education seriously dislike each other, and are attracted to the same young woman, one may expect an exchange of sarcasms but not of sword thrusts. The tension is mental

rather than physical. No doubt Benjafield was exasperated by Carden's likeableness and its success. He was supposed to despise the crowd and its preferences, but his frigid poise had felt the Egyptian sun. As a matter of fact both men were getting rather heated. For though Carden smiled, he was very conscious of Benjafield's sneers and of the other fellow's assumption of a high-brow superiority.

At all events, the feud between them arrived at a most strange climax. There was some attempt to hush up the story. It made a bad advertisement. It was not quite credible, and yet it was sufficiently credible to cause people unpleasant qualms. Egypt, the Egypt of the tombs and the temples, is considered to be a nice commercial asset, or as interesting "atmosphere," a golden lure to the restless magnates with money. Karnak by moonlight may be melody and mystery or mere mumming. Occultists may say what they please: the menu is more real than a mystery.

Carden had enthusiasm. That was one of the reasons why he was so offensive to Benjafield. He looked at Egypt with the eyes of a craftsman and the artist; he took innumerable photos; he talked "temples"; he dared to be impressed. Benjafield would never allow himself to be impressed; your personality ought to be able to dominate any old stone ruin. An adjective should seldom be resorted to, but when used, it should be unique and unexpected, and untarnished by the crowd.

Carden could refer to Mahomet Ali's mosque as "lovely"—"a soaring upwards in stone." He talked of "the massive wedges of the pyramids cleaving the sky." Denderah was "a dream." Benjafield called such stuff "caramel," or verbiage; and yet Norah Mandeville could listen to Carden. She and Carden wandered about together in the courts and the sanctuaries. She saw no offence in Carden's enthusiastic babblings; she seemed to like it. But with Benjafield the offence grew daily more flagrant, until he felt that he must freeze or frighten or subdue those sanguine enthusiasms. The Egyptian sun was getting into his blood.

The *Isis* was at Luxor. The sun blazed; hawks whistled. From across the river came the noise of the donkey-boys. Sailing-boats manned by men in red jerseys flew to and fro. For the cosmopolitan crowd upon the *Isis* it was the day of the Valley of the Tombs.

The day began badly for Benjafield. He was unlucky in his donkey: one of those fidgety, perverse, little stumbling beasts that allow a rider no peace. Carden and Norah were well mounted, and though Benjafield bribed his donkey-boy, he was more often than not attached to the tail of the party, and the recipient of the flies and the dust. In the great, tawny, treeless valley the heat seemed to radiate from hot metal. Benjafield's donkey did nothing but stumble; and in the end its rider got off and walked.

He was very hot, both within and without, when he followed the dragoman down the long, sloping gallery into the tomb of one of the Pharaohs. It was very close and hot in the tomb, and the feet of many tourists had churned up the fine dust. The painted walls were dimly lit by an occasional electric light. The live figures moved silently in this cavern of the dead. The dragoman's voice sounded muffled and dull.

"This way, please, ladies and gentlemen. Here you see Osiris . . ."

Benjafield joined the others. He was carrying his topee and mopping his forehead. The place had a stuffy airlessness, a deep languor. The procession of dim figures seemed to move with irritating slowness. People loitered and stared.

They came to the sepulchral chamber and grouped themselves about and above the square cavity in which a great, grey sarcophagus stood. It lay bathed in light, while the rest of the chamber was in a deep shadow. A sheet of glass covered the open sarcophagus, and below the glass lay a bronze-coloured shape, the mummy of the Pharaoh.

Benjafield found himself leaning upon the wooden railing that surrounded the cavity. He was aware of a circle of faces and of an intense silence. Directly opposite him he saw Carden and Norah Mandeville, side by side and very close, gazing down at that brown shape. Some impulse, and a twinge of irritation, made him move round behind the backs of the party and join those two.

Carden was speaking in a low voice.

"Looks like a piece of bronze set in amber, doesn't he?"

The girl was silent and absorbed, and her silence seemed to affect Carden.

"Makes you feel—strange?"

"Very."

"I shouldn't like to spend a night in this place."

Benjafield's voice, sharp and ironical, broke in behind them.

"What rot!"

There was something so challenging in the interruption, it was so abrupt and yet so deliberate, that Carden turned sharply and unsmilingly upon his enemy.

"Thank you. Perhaps you will keep your remarks for your ass. Pharaoh has ears."

"But not the head of an ass. Isn't it curious that when people are taken down to some old hole in the ground they should develop the mentality of rabbits!"

The party was moving off at the heels of the dragoman, but one or two of the men loitered to listen to the squabble.

"Thank you, Mr. Benjafield. So I am one of the rabbits?"

She sided with Carden, and her partizan-ship appeared to act upon Benjafield like some potent drug. He was white as parchment. Almost you could imagine horns starting to grow from his ram's head.

He pointed with the handle of his fly-whisk at the mummy.

"Do you mean to say one should be afraid of—that? I'll spend a night here with pleasure, just to prove it. Carden, of course, would prefer his bunk."

Carden's face was almost as white as his enemy's.

"That's a lie! If you are serious——"

"Oh, quite!"

"I'll toss you—who tries first."

He brought out an English shilling, and there in the dim light they went through the ritual.

"Heads, I take first turn; tails, you do."

"Right."

Tails it was, and Benjafield, with a kind of sardonic grin on his face, gave a little laugh.

"A night with Pharaoh! I'm not going to let you funk it, Carden."

"You can go—to Pharaoh, my friend."

Nothing can be so serious as some absurd adventure entered upon by two angry men whose antipathies are elemental and coloured with passion. It was Benjafield who spoke to the dragoman, but that suave and stout old gentleman shrugged and would have none of it. If Mr. Benjafield wished to persuade one of the official caretakers to let him remain in a tomb all night, well—that was Mr. Benjafield's affair. It was Mr. Benjafield's affair.

"Point out the man," said he.

The dragoman replied with a dignified and sulky gesture.

"I take no responsibility."

Benjafield went up to the robed gate-keeper, a lean fellow with a grey goat's-tuft on his chin. The man had some English. They stood together in the half gloom of the great gallery, and in Benjafield's hand was a wad of notes. Money may be Pharaoh. The Egyptian listened with the look of a sly, grey goat offered succulent fodder. He put out a hand.

"How much?"

"Two-hundred piastres."

"Four-hundred, Mister."

He insisted that there would be other men to bribe, and Benjafield, after some haggling, handed over half the sum agreed upon. The rest was to be paid when the gate of the tomb was unlocked in the morning. The Egyptian's goat's eyes remained fixed upon the pocket in which the Englishman had replaced the wad of notes.

"To-night—at ten o'clock."

"The gentleman will come alone?"

"No: friends will see you lock the gate on me; then they will go away. I shall bring candles."

So it was arranged; and Benjafield, with a kind of fierce, cold smirk, strolled up on his long legs to where Carden and the girl were standing in the sunlight.

"All fixed. I'm to be locked in at ten to-night. I shall want you, Carden, and another man to come up and see it done. We'll take donkeys half-way up the valley and leave them there. We can tell the boys we have come to see the valley by moonlight."

He looked into Carden's eyes.

"You are going through with it?"

"I am."

"I have paid for my night's lodging. I'll leave you to pay for yours."

On the way home, riding between green crops of barley and clover and sugar-cane, Norah spoke to her lover.

"It's both mad and silly, and rather horrible. I don't like it."

Carden's smile had come back.

"Just silly. But he has dared me. It's fate."

"I know you must do it. Men will do such things."

"Yes, on occasions"; and he looked at her with the eyes of a lover: "strange countries—and other things—make one a little mad."

After dinner the little party slipped away, Benjafield, Carden, and Colonel Bradshaw. The *Isis* had settled down to its Bridge or its gossipings, or had gone to Karnak, or to the Winter Palace to dance. Norah watched the three men get into their boat, and like a ship of the dead it glided away across the river. There was a great silence. On the sands beyond, a guide and three donkey-boys were waiting, blessing the moonlight and the mad English and *bakshish*.

Carden and the colonel returned about midnight. The full moon blazed, and the white upper works of the *Isis* were reflected in the calm water. Norah, leaning over the rail of the upper deck, called to Carden as he came aboard.

He joined her. The colonel, who was so sleepy and thought the whole affair sheer foolishness, went straight to his cabin.

She asked the obvious question.

"You have left him there?"

"Yes; we saw the fellow lock the iron gate. By George, that valley gave me the creeps! It seemed full of dry bones. If a skeleton had got up and chased us, I should not have felt surprised."

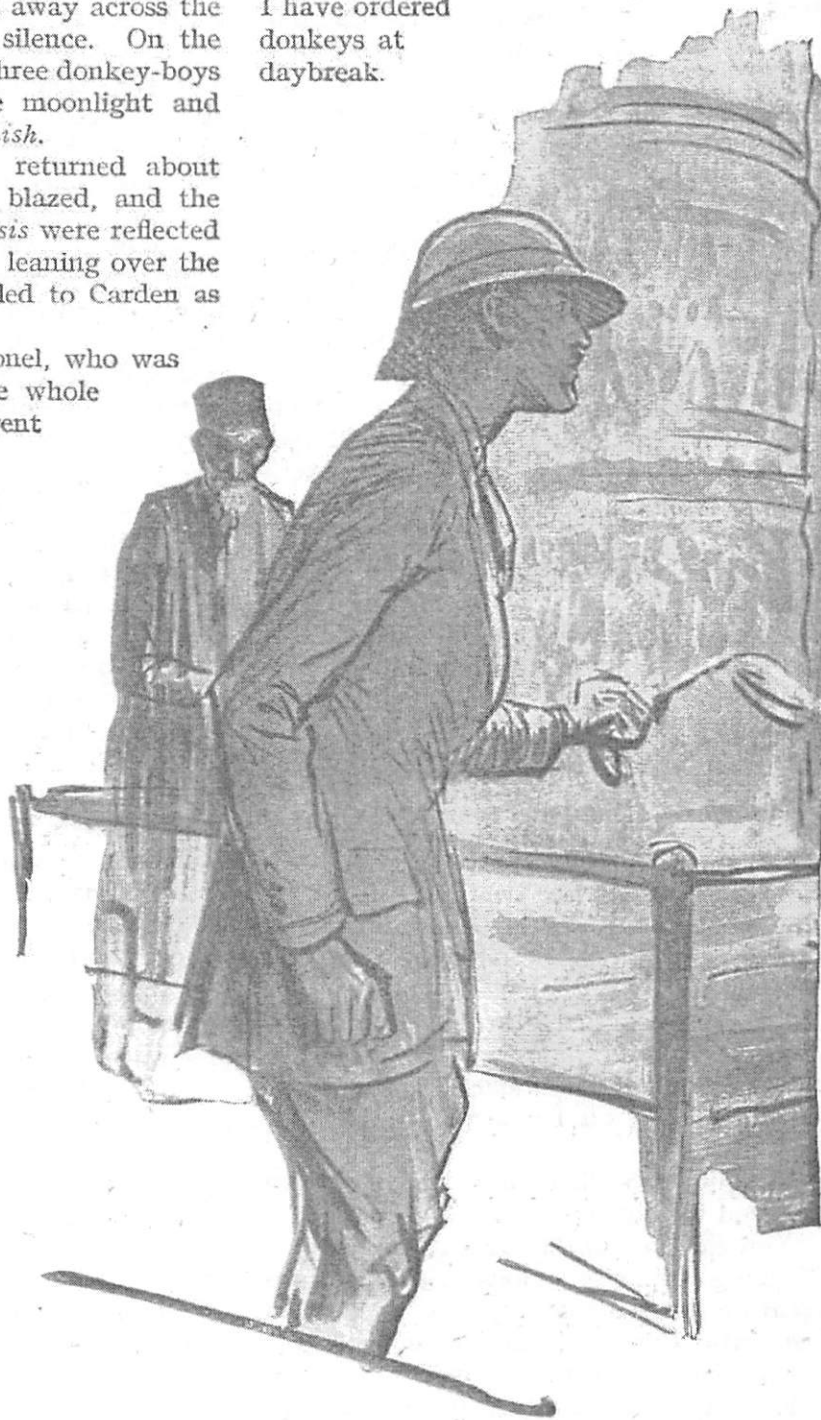
Leaning on the rail, he looked across at the dim hills. It was not fear that he had felt, but something that was akin to fear. His senses had been on the alert, the sentinels of a consciousness alive to strangeness and mystery.

"You know—we moderns are a flippant crowd. We come to a country like this, and chatter and drink our cocktails, and import jazz bands, but when you get away from modernity into a valley like that, with a full moon shining, and every rock and stone as dry and as dead as the moon, you feel that there is a great shadowy something watching you."

She shivered slightly. The Egyptian nights are cold.

"Did he mind?"

"I think he liked it less—than when we started. But, of course, it's all nonsense. The colonel and I have ordered donkeys at daybreak."



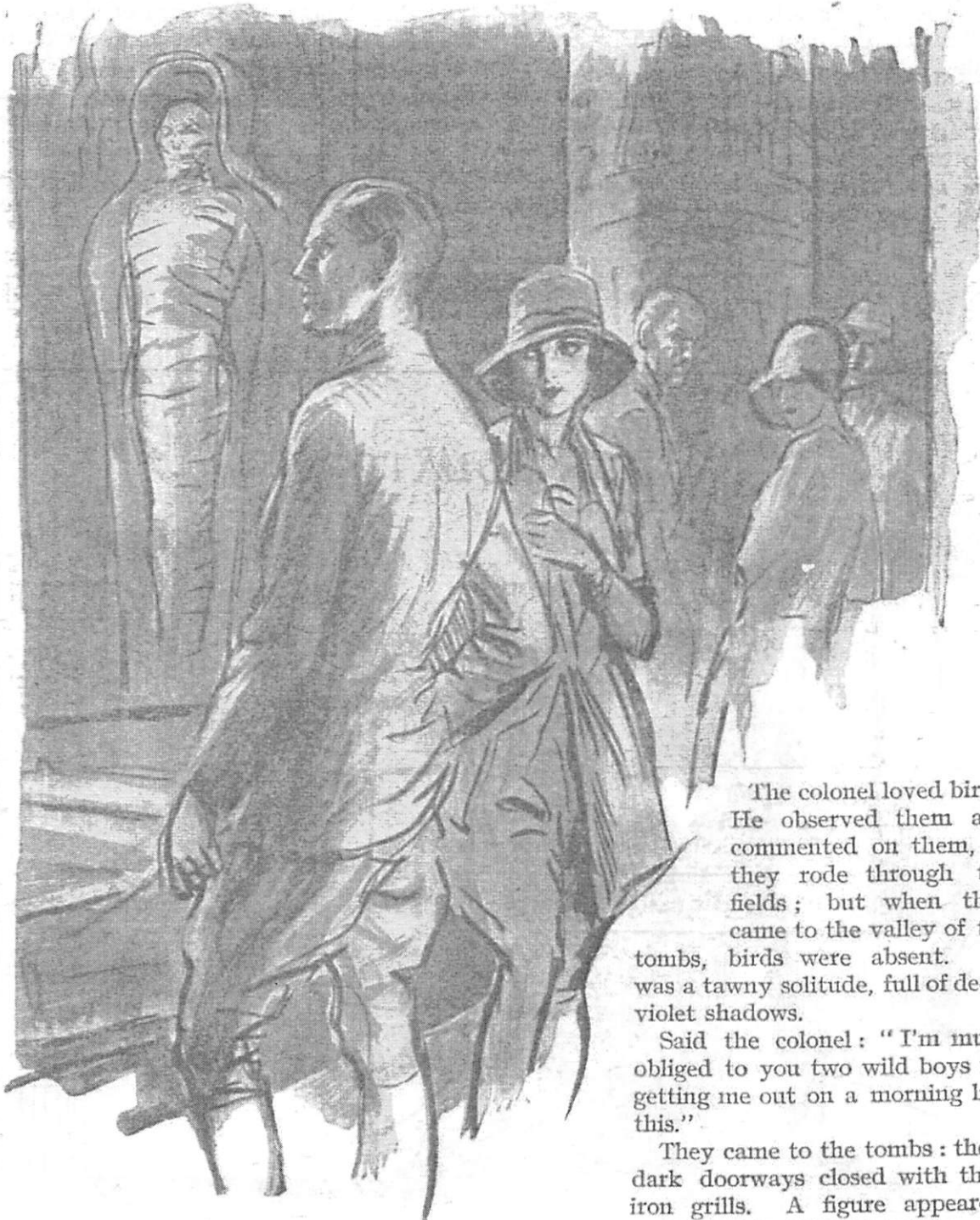
"I'll spend a night here with pleasure, just to prove it. Carden, of course, would prefer his bunk."

The fellow will be there to unlock the gate about seven. Benjafield will be back on the boat in time for a bath and a shave before breakfast."

She was silent. She was thinking that it would be Carden's turn to be locked in that vast tomb with the mummy of a dead Pharaoh. But how absurd! There was nothing there but dust and a great stillness.

Carden and the colonel were away long before the white-robed, red-fezzed servants

rose, and the river flushed with it. The colonel had contrived an early cup of tea, and he rode his donkey, with a very black cheroot scenting the air. He was cheerful. Carden was not. He had started out on a couple of dry biscuits, and somehow he had no stomach for tobacco.



Carden's face was almost as white as his enemy's.

"That's a lie! . . ."

were distributing hot-water cans to the cabins of the *Isis*. It was a perfect morning, and they had seen the east the colour of a

The colonel loved birds. He observed them and commented on them, as they rode through the fields; but when they came to the valley of the tombs, birds were absent. It was a tawny solitude, full of deep, violet shadows.

Said the colonel: "I'm much obliged to you two wild boys for getting me out on a morning like this."

They came to the tombs: those dark doorways closed with their iron grills. A figure appeared, smiling, surreptitious, polite. It flourished a key.

"I unlock the gate, sar."

The colonel sniffed.

"These fellows always smell sinister to me."

The grill was unlocked, and, standing in the shadow of the entry, Carden called to his enemy.

"Benjafield, Benjafield—hallo!"

His voice roused a muffled reverberation in the great, sloping gallery; but no answer came to them out of the darkness.

"The fellow's asleep," said the colonel. "Turn on the lights, you! We'll go and wake him."

But Carden felt a cold tremor down his spine. The electric globes flashed up, stringing a number of yellow points down the painted passage. Colonel Bradshaw led the way. They went down and down into that heavy, dusty silence until they came to

the sepulchral chamber with its haze of light and its outlying glooms.

Carden, who was a pace or two behind the colonel, heard the other's sudden exclamation.

"My God!"

And then Carden saw what the soldier was staring at—Benjafield, stark and white and naked, lying under that sheet of glass in the sarcophagus where the bronze-coloured mummy had reposed.

The colonel turned with the face of a man leading other men forward under shell-fire.

"Where's that Gypsy devil? Where?"

But the man with the little grey beard and the surreptitious, goat-like smile had disappeared.



CONSOLATORY



Family Doctor (condoling with father on the arrival of twins): "Well—there's nothing like having a houseful of young people at Christmas!"

15

The Sun Lady

It is Never Safe to Understand a Woman By Warwick Deeping

HE had a clever, handsome face, and he lounged delicately behind the ropes watching the carriages go by with their masses of flowers. At such a time and in such a place, with the sky as blue as the sea, and the white houses flashing back the sunlight, he was an apposite figure, an attractive person at whom inconsequential women could throw flowers. Looked at more narrowly and with a glance of experienced inwardness, he was less boyishly casual than he seemed. His nostrils were too narrow, his mouth too voracious, his eyes were flat and of a greyish blackness, very watchful behind an assumption of interesting ennui.

"Hallo, Leroux!"

"Ah! You here! Of course!"

Another man joined him, emerging from the crowd, an obvious young man, all breeze and white teeth and carefully groomed animation.

"What do you think of it? The best show since the war!"

"Too much mauve and puce!"

"What! You have travelled beyond cerise and sky-blue, surely?"

"I prefer black and white."

"White carnations and black velvet. Twenty years too old for me!"

A laughing girl with a yellow headband threw a bunch of violets at Leroux; she was standing up in a carriage that was decorated to look like a huge basket of flowers, all gold and purple. Leroux showed his teeth in a smile, and with a languid movement of a yellow-gloved hand flicked a small bunch of flowers delicately back at her.

"These kittens!" he said patronizingly.

Ferrand laughed.

"How old are you?"

"One hundred and ten years. A comfortable cat on the look-out for a cushion!"

"Is that so?" said his acquaintance with a glance of vague disrelish.

The Battle of Flowers proceeded till the violets, carnations, stocks and mimosa were strewn under the wheels of the carriages and automobiles and crushed by them. The sun blazed. Leroux continued to look bored yet watchful as the procession circulated up and down the promenade.

Ferrand was conducting a duel with a pink lady in a pink-and-white bird's nest when he felt Leroux touch his arm.

"The next carriage."

"What, the black-and-white basket?"

"Who's the woman? Wait a moment!"

Leroux showed sudden animation. His pose of boredom disappeared, and in its place he wore the look of the young man whose fancy has been caught in the thick of this harmless fooling. His eyes smiled in a direct yet appreciative stare. The set of his head suggested audacity, the audacity of youth when it is irresponsible and gallant. He threw a bunch of flowers into the lap of the woman whose carriage was decorated with white carnations and black-and-white ribbons.

She smiled at him. She picked up the bunch of violets, but made no attempt to throw them back at him. Instead, she raised them to her face as though to enjoy their perfume.

"My dear chap!" said Ferrand, looking curiously at Leroux.

"Who is she? You are supposed to know everybody in Nice."

"I know her by sight and by reputation. Someone christened her the Painted Lady."

"Is that all? She does it well. And she does not belong to the half-world."

"I don't know. She is fifty—if she is a day!"

"Oh! I dare say. She has taste, and I should say she had——"

"What?"

"A past."

Ferrand gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"She lives here, I suppose?"

"They say so."

And then he smiled and watched his neighbour as he uttered the next words.

"She is supposed to be gorgeously rich."

"Indeed," said Leroux; "how *bête*!"

At this point Ferrand was hailed by a party of friends in a wagon disguised as a boat. He was a lad of ideas; he ran alongside, making movements as though he were swimming, and pretending to be in extreme distress.

Amid laughter and applause he was hauled aboard and Leroux was left alone to wait for the return of the black-and-white carriage.

"If she still has those flowers," he thought, "I'll try it. A woman of her age ought to be delighted. When a man has exhausted his credit it is time for him to look around and find a comfortable corner."

He crossed the road and waited for the black-and-white carriage to return on the other side, and, being very much a young man of the world, and expert in dealing with all its adventurous details, he knew that the next move should be hers. Her carriage reappeared. She made a slight movement with the hand that held the bunch of flowers.

Leroux raised his hat and bowed. Next moment he was in her carriage, sitting opposite to her with his back to the horses, and looking humorous and pleased.

"Luck comes to the fortunate, madame."

"Not always," said she. "Still—you will get a ride in a carriage."

He laughed.

"Ah! A particular carriage. I must be allowed to emphasize that point. By the way, my name is Leroux, Gaspard Leroux."

She observed him, but she did not tell him her name, and he, too, was examining her with those flat and sinister wise eyes of his, the eyes of a young man who fancied that he knew everything and who believed in nothing. She had been a very handsome woman in her day, and she still had much comeliness. There was something roguish and big and pleasant about her, a shrewdness behind her good-natured eyes that should have warned the young roué in her carriage that she knew a little about life.

"You amuse yourself here, my child?"

Her attitude was unexpected, yet knowing how little of the child he had inside

himself, he was not annoyed by it. On the contrary he arranged his own attitude to correspond with it.

"I am very bored, madame."

"Here?"

"I should say that I—was—bored. All these very young things, how trying they are! One is expected to be so gay, but one is not asked to be witty."

"Ah!" said she; "you have got ahead of yourself. You should put the clock back."

"But is that possible? The war took away one's Spring."

"The war was very useful. It allowed people to account for so many things."

"Madame is ironical!"

"Not at all. I am truthful."

"Then you are rich."

"You think so?"

"Only the very rich can afford to be truthful."

"Not always. I know poor people who are very honest!"

"How refreshing. Madame's conversation is doing me good. It is so charming to be able to talk to a woman who understands things."

She made herself assume the air of a woman who is touched and flattered.

"Really, I am quite enjoying this show."

"So am I, now. It was very lucky for me. Of course I hoped that madame would be here."

"Indeed! So——!"

"Every afternoon at three o'clock a carriage drives along the promenade. The lady is always in black, and black is the most subtle and sympathetic of colours."

She pretended to be amused, challenged.

"Well, I shall be driving here tomorrow. It passes the time for a woman who is lonely."

He made an inward note of that last word, for in his language it meant just what she wished him to think that it meant.

"I shall be—near the entrance to the pier, on the side towards the sea. But madame has not told me her name."

She laughed, and made a little movement with the hand that held the bunch of flowers.

"My name is Vaubon; Diane Vaubon. Yes, and a widow—Widow Vaubon!"

He assumed a look of eager gratitude.

"How good of you to tell me that!"

Madame Vaubon's carriage carried her home, and it drove in the direction of Cimiez, but its destination was not set among the surroundings that Leroux would have expected or approved of. Her villa—for she had a villa—had been enveloped by the dusty growth of the new and labouring Nice. It stood on the slope of a hill and was entered by an iron gateway between two brick pillars. Villa Sans Gêne! It looked it. Lying in its large and unbusy garden it had the air of a house that did not worry about trifles, or fly into a rage because a dog had buried a bone among the stocks and wallflowers, or because the painter had not come with his paint pot.

There were some children playing in the garden, children of the people, and they came tearing across the grass as madame's carriage turned in at the gates.

"O, *mais madame—elle est belle!*"

Two scrambled in, while the rest hung on to the back axle-bar. Madame Vaubon laughed.

"Yes, they have been stealing the oranges," said the swarthy old gardener, who was putting plants into one of the beds in front of the house.

"And did you never steal oranges, Lazare?"

"Plenty, madame, but not impudently. Some people have no gratitude. To take when things are given!"

"Oh, the birds do it, Lazare. It is natural."

She entered the house, and passing into her salon sat down with the air of a woman who was glad to be home. Marie came in, the thin, bright-eyed, bustling Marie who hopped like a bird on a twig, and found her mistress laughing and holding a bunch of flowers.

"Madame has enjoyed herself?"

Madame had.

"Oh, *là-là*, a young rascal has been trying to make love to me!"

"It is not so very unnatural, madame."

"Ah, you think not! But this sort of young man, a *flâneur*, a lawyer, a borrower of other people's purses! It is going to be amusing for me, Marie."

"How so?"

"Oh, like that." And Madame Vaubon went through the process of putting something on her knee and applying to it the flat of a large and generous hand.

"Come, get me out of these clothes. How refreshing it is to be natural again. Contrasts, my dear. Down there they think me a silly old woman with a painted face, and it amuses me and refreshes me and gives me each day a new conviction of the real values. Well, who is coming to call?"

"Cecile."

"Ah, yes!"

"She has quarrelled again with her husband. And old Thérèse Michel."

"I won't see Thérèse. She is an old cringer and a humbug. Anyone else?"

"Mademoiselle Olga."

"Ah, poor thing!"

"They have turned her out of that perfumery shop because she coughs."

"Hard people may be right at times, Marie. Anyone else?"

"Big André, the smith."

"And what does he want?"

"He and his wife wish to call their baby Diane, but only on the understanding that it does not mean a present. He says that he has had enough from madame."

"That's pleasant. It makes me feel as though I had had a good dinner."

So Madame Vaubon put off her wig and her Paris clothes, and washed her face, and appeared as a large and pleasant person in an old blue dress and big black shoes. She was handsome still, but handsome as an elderly woman should be who is healthy and happy and has learnt to spend her instincts in ripening the fruit in other gardens than her own. The people of the suburb did not call her the Painted Lady. They called her La Dame Soleil.

She had vigour and a vigorous way of dealing with people. When Cecile came to be sympathized with over the complexities of her marriage, madame took the little black-haired, passionate ex-seamstress by the shoulders and shook her.

"You pretend that you want advice. No one wants advice. They desire only to be allowed to grumble. Now what is the matter?"

"Oh, madame."

"Has he beaten you?"

"No."

"Or been kissing other women?"

"No."

"It is a pity. The fact is he is too quiet a fellow."



The door opened and Marie appeared with big André

"He wants to give me a baby."

"One has to begin being a little unselfish."

"Yes, but why should the woman have to supply all the unselfishness?"

"My dear, I see that you want babies made by machinery! We must see about that."

"You are mocking at me, madame."

"No, no. Did I not say that life may be hard for a mother? But then—it seems—that you are not fit to be a mother."

"Not fit! On the contrary——"

"Well, go and prove it, my dear, go and prove it."

"Has madame ever had children?"

"Yes, two, and lost them—both of them, which—believe me—my dear—was a good deal harder than bearing them. Two boys killed in the war."

"Oh, madame, forgive me; I am sorry."

Next Olga was dealt with, but differently from Cecile, for Olga was sick and broken and workless.

"The doctor says that I should go to a sanatorium for six months."

"I will see to it, *ma chérie*," said Madame Vaubon.

Big André followed Olga, a dark, stately Provençal with huge shoulders and steady eyes.

"Madame has heard perhaps that we wish to call our baby after her?"

"It is a great compliment, Monsieur André."

"After all madame's kindness it is but a little thing, and it should bring the baby good luck."

It was nothing to these people of the suburb that Madame Vaubon put on a wig and painted her face and drove daily up and down the Promenade des Anglais, for they understood her far better than did the loungers who amused themselves in the sunshine. It was not vanity that made her do it, nor a desperate desire to seem young. The business was much more subtle than that, and with the help of Marie madame's friends and admirers came to view it as something more than a whim. Madame had her reasons; she was a humorist and a philosopher; the real Diane Vaubon was the woman of the grey hair and the laughing kindly eyes; the Diane Vaubon of the Promenade des Anglais was an effigy carried in procession, a subtle jest, a contrast created for the emphasizing of her sounder values. It added piquancy to the art of living. Some stuffy old lady might have gone about for years dispensing baby-linen and petticoats and ten-franc



"This young man has insulted me. I shall be grateful to you if you will put him outside"

notes, and remained nothing more than a busybody. Madame Vaubon was loved because she was "gaillard," and because it was whispered that she had been wild in her youth.

A very marriageable woman! So many elderly bachelors and widowers had thought. And next morning she took young Gaspard Leroux into her carriage and drove up and down with him, making it her affair to find out whether the young man was sheer trash, or an ugly blackguard, or a merely misguided child who needed a kind, maternal smack. He made love to her, and he did it so well that she realized how dangerous he might have been to a woman whom loneliness and passion had rendered vulnerable.

She set her wits against his.

"Oh, what it is to talk to a woman of understanding! Madame is so charming, so vital."

"It is easy to be charming when one has plenty of money."

"Oh, no, not always. Money dulls. It is when we know how to use it so generously."

She considered him.

"You must come and call on me, my friend."

"To-morrow?"

"If you like. Let us say four o'clock."

"Madame, I shall be breathless."

She laughed, but as he got out of the carriage he gave her a devastating look and pressed her hand.

"You rascal!" she laughed to herself as she drove away, but presently her laughter changed to an expression that was ominous.

Meanwhile Leroux undertook a tour of investigation, and having discovered the Villa Sans Gêne, he was both surprised and disappointed, for it had not the air of a house that belonged to a woman of wealth.

He reminded himself that it was necessary to be cautious, and when he called next day on Madame Vaubon he was prepared for diplomacy. It was one of his sayings that he had ceased to be surprised at anything, but Madame Vaubon succeeded in surprising him. He had expected a great toilet, every artifice refined to its most subtle limit, but in place of a wax-work beauty he saw an elderly woman with grey hair, dressed in a floppy, yellow Japanese kimono.

She saw his astonishment, and his quick pocketing of it.

"Well, what do you think of my villa?"

"It is charming," he said, "as charming as its owner."

He was cleverer than she had thought, and his cleverness showed itself in a sudden restraint and a more reverential attitude. He had come to make love to an old woman who was full of the stress of sex, and he had found a pleasant, grey-haired person who might have been the wife of an official in a provincial town.

At the end of his first call, and when he had bowed himself out of her salon, she stood at the window and watched him go down to the iron gates.

"That was a little bit of a shock to you, my friend, but you behaved quite nicely. Now, if you are an honest fellow you will not come here again; but if you do—I have another card up my sleeve."

In two or three days' time she realized that he was a remarkable, sinister and clever young person, and she proceeded to play that card.

"Gaspard, a woman is at such a disadvantage, especially a lonely woman. I am always being bothered and worried. People sponge on me so."

His flat eyes showed two little points of light.

"Who?"

"The people round here, and wherever I go."

"I expect you are too generous," he said, with a suggestion of tenderness.

"I have so much money, and I have no one to advise me. Why, only this morning my bankers wrote to remind me that I have one hundred and fifty thousand francs lying idle. They suggest that it should be invested."

"Certainly."

"But how am I to invest it? Everything is topsy-turvy these days."

"Diane," he said, with some impressiveness, "I never like giving financial advice—even to friends. But to you—"

"Why not to me?"

He appeared a little confused.

"Oh, come, surely I am not so terrible?"

"But if I advised you—and my advice proved faulty—it would hurt me. Don't you understand?"

She lowered her eyes, and had the air of concealing some emotion.

"Then you refuse to help me?"

"You put me in a very difficult position."

"Ah, you are too sensitive."

"Perhaps."

"But surely a man can advise—when he should be so much more *au fait* with these things?"

He came and stood behind her chair.

"Diane, may I think it over? This goes deeper than you imagine."

"Of course," she said, "I appreciate your sensitiveness. Come and see me to-morrow."

But now she saw through him, and had gauged the inwardness of this superfine young loungeur with the delicately greedy nostrils and the voracious mouth. For Madame Vaubon also had made investigations, calling in the little old lawyer who managed her affairs while she was in Nice, and in two days this old gentleman had produced facts about Monsieur Gaspard Leroux that placed him in the correct category.

"A decadent, madame, a parasite. Is he asking you for money?"

"I think, monsieur, that he is going to ask me to marry him."

"*Ma foi!* And you?"

"I think I shall know how to answer that insult."

"You call it an insult, madame?"

"What else is it? That this puppy should assume me to be a foolish old

woman who will give him a nicely cushioned basket for the rest of his life! And money, money to spend on another woman!"

On the morning of the particular day Madame Vaubon sent a polite message by Marie to big André, saying that she would count it as a kindness if he were in her house at four o'clock and would wait in case she might have need of him.

Madame Vaubon made no personal preparations for the afternoon's comedy, but as she sat by the window waiting for the final development of the adventure she reminded herself that what was comedy to her might have spelled tragedy to other women. She still wondered whether Leroux would come, and when she saw him enter the gate she wondered whether he would have the hardihood to ask her to marry him.

She called to Marie.

"Our visitor is coming. What of André?"

"He is in the kitchen, madame."

"Good. If I should ring the bell you will know that I shall want you both."

Leroux was impressive, suggestively tender from the moment he entered the room. He stood looking at Diane Vaubon, and then he crossed to her quickly and kissed her hand.

"Sit down," she said.

She was very calm, and with a calmness that made the man think that she was prepared to hear a great declaration, for many women betray nothing until the potent words have been spoken. They sit and wait until the offering is laid at their feet. Leroux drew a chair close to her. He looked at her with the eyes of a lover.

"I have been thinking hard, Diane."

"About my money?"

"Yes. Surely it must be as evident to you as it is evident to me that a man cannot advise a woman unless he has the right to advise her?"

"In all cases?"

"No, not in all cases, but in such a case as mine—yes."

She lowered her eyes.

"Ah, you mean——"

"That it concerns me too dearly."

And then he asked her to marry him.

She looked older by ten years when he uttered those significant words; a look of severity came into her eyes.

"Do you know how old I am?"

"No. But I could guess."

"Guess."

"Forty-three."

She drew a deep breath, and looked as though he had struck her.

"I am fifty-seven. And you ask me to marry you?"

"I do—because—Diane—I——"

She turned on him swiftly, and her face astonished Leroux, for it was the face of a woman whose big heart held many emotions. She was angry, and she was hurt, and she was scornful. It was as though some impertinent apache had asked this figure of France to marry him, the France who had bled and laughed and loved and wept and lost children.

"You infamous thing!" she said.

She moved quickly to the bell, and paused there with her hand on the button.

"There is nothing more to be said."

Leroux got on his feet; his face had gone white, and his flat eyes looked ugly. He understood her now, and he understood the crass ineptitude of his blunder. He grew insolent.

"Oh, well, Madame, you led me to believe——"

"I encouraged you?"

"It appears that you are one of those elderly women——"

She pressed the bell.

"My child, you are bad. If there had been just a little goodness in you, a little shame, the old woman might have helped you. For helping people is one of the few things that is worth while. But as it is—I shall have you turned out."

He stood with his head back, teeth showing, like a vicious animal.

"You—you——"

She held up a hand, and as she did so the door opened and Marie appeared with big André.

"Monsieur André," said Madame Vaubon, "this young man has insulted me. I shall be grateful to you if you will put him outside the gate."

André obliged her. And André had a rough way with him at times.



16

Ishmael

by

WARWICK DEEPING

Loyalty mattered to Olive Snell, and her Perfect Faith led her to a Just Reward

THAT ecstatic creature—Mable James—returned to Le Paysage after having tea with a friend at the Hôtel St. George. Colonel Sandeman and Olive Snell were in the garden of Le Paysage, sitting at a suggestive distance from each other, though this was Olive's fault and not the colonel's. Mable became visible through the olive trees, a red leather Algerian bag in one hand and a white coat ornamented with large purple and blue flowers over the other arm.

"Hang these mosquitoes!"

Olive raised her eyes from her book. She happened to know that Colonel Sandeman's irritability was not due wholly to the blood hunger of the mosquitoes.

"Here's Mable."

The colonel glanced over his shoulder.

"Blessed damsel; always gay. I don't believe these infernal insects ever bite her. Dashed bad taste, all the same."

Mable came waving coat and bag. She was one of those dainty and exultant persons who never grow old. Her retroussé nose piqued life from the centre of a round and peach-like face. She had eyes of unsophisticated blue.

"Oh, isn't the St. George lovely! And I have bought these."

The colonel put on his fatherly face.

"Everything in Algiers is lovely, even the old gentleman who sells you impossible coats and carpets—"

"This isn't impossible. Do look at it, Olive. I thought it would do for a tennis coat. Oh, and Mrs. Mumby says that Bir Mousa is a dream, and that when we get there we must ask for Ahmed."

"And who is Ahmed?"

"The posh guide. A real charmer. Everybody has him. He speaks French beautifully, and sells you carpets."

"Oh, does he," said the colonel; "he

can give me the French and keep the carpets."

Olive Snell knew that Mable James was like a child, a rather lovable child. If you looked at her toys and listened to her little adventures she was happy for the rest of the day, and Olive did not grudge her her happiness. Happiness! How elusive it was—how relative! She had lost the gift of unselfconscious happiness, and her attitude towards life had grown cautious and reserved.

Mable and Colonel Sandeman watched her detach herself and stroll down under the pines to the steep hillside, where through the fruit blossom you saw the blue of the sea. They did not remark upon her going. She had cultivated the art of detachment, and they had grown accustomed to it. She floated away from you like a cloud and left you gazing. There were times when she seemed as solitary as a cloud.

"Isn't it a pity?" said the girl.

Sandeman filled his pipe. He was lean and brown and fifty, and for the last three years—ever since poor Norman Cartwright's disappearance—he had been trying to persuade Olive Snell to marry him.

"Most women would have forgotten."

"Oh—probably. She—might have forgotten. People do forget, you know. But then, you see—"

He smiled whimsically at the girl, this sentimental creature who rushed about adoring everything, and whose present passion was for camels and sheiks, palm trees and things.

"But what a pity. She takes it so seriously."

"Well, it was rather tragic, Mab. I often think it was a pity that Cartwright was vindicated."

"Oh, don't say that!"

"I do say it. If he had disappeared and remained out of her life as a dis-

graced man—well, she would have made herself forget, but it was the irony of his vindication after he had vanished."

Mable sighed.

"Do you think he is dead?"

"I should think so."

"That wicked old Babercombe, lying about the order he had given Captain Cartwright, just to save himself for being held responsible for that disaster."

"Babercombe was a moral coward. And the pity of it was that Cartwright behaved like a moral coward."

"But—did he?"

"He ran away—disappeared. If he had stuck the disgrace of it——"

"You mean that Olive would have stood by him?"

"My dear, can you see Olive deserting her man in such a crisis? She's not that sort. She would have stuck by Norman Cartwright. What must have hurt her most was his running away."

"I suppose it did. But supposing it was his pride?"

"Well—why didn't he share it with Olive? And then that belated vindication—and the irony of it after he had been non-existent for two years. That must have hurt her."

"But, colonel, she was glad."

"Exactly, glad on the surface. But there were bitternesses—regrets. Cartwright was a fool."

Most people had forgotten this three-year-old tragedy, in which a senior officer had sworn away a junior's honour, only to put a bullet through his own head a year after the scandal had been one of the month's sensations. The letter that Colonel Babercombe had left behind him had vindicated a man whom the world supposed to be dead. And it had opened an old wound in the heart of a woman. Colonel Sandeman was right. Life, when in its ironical moods, is hardest to bear.

Moreover, Olive had given Charles Sandeman a deeper glimpse into the complex of herself. He had ventured to suggest that her aloofness was not convincing, and that it was absurd for a woman of thirty to behave like a widow. And a romantic widow! Hadn't life other propositions?

"This is a mere phase," he had said; "I won't call it a pose. You can't bother to pose. But why not bury the whole tragic business and put on a new frock?"

"Because it is not dead," she had told him.

"You mean to say——?"

"He is alive. We don't talk about our emotions. It isn't done. We leave that to housemaids. But can't you see that my feeling that Norman is alive makes all the difference?"

Sandeman had seen it.

"But what—what a waste! If he is alive, the probabilities are——"

"That he has gone to the dogs! I don't believe it.—Besides, loyalty does matter."

Here, in Algiers, where you plucked roses and oranges off the trees when there was snow on Atlas, and danced, and took sun baths, and played golf and tennis, and went for jaunts to old ruined Roman cities and to the desert, the subtler shades of life seemed unconvincing. Colour, full sunlight, broad effects, a simplicity of sea and sky and mountain. It was reasonable to leave the northern atmosphere and its moods behind. So Sandeman had thought.

"She'll thaw in the sun. She'll want to live again."

But she had not thawed. She had retained her northern aloofness, her air of waiting amid the mists for some inevitable, though distant, summer.

Sandeman felt restless, and his was the restlessness of a man who wanted to settle down and couldn't. He was tired of playing the game alone; *Le Paysage* had begun to bore him; the cooking was not what it was; his golf had deteriorated. It was time to hire a car and go and visit the desert, the very tame desert suited to such people as Mable James. Biskra, Bon Saada, or Bir Mousa—what did it matter?

He proposed it to the women.

"These char-a-banc trips are too boring. We had much better hire a car and make our own arrangements. What about next week?"

He had Mable's enthusiasm on tiptoe for a flight.

"Oh, rather. I want to see the Ouled Nacla."

Sandeman held up a finger.

"No, young woman, no. You are neither young enough nor old enough. And it's a dull business. That sort of thing—is—dull."

They decided to go to Bir Mousa, but

three days before they were due to start on the pilgrimage Olive developed influenza. She tried to persuade Mable to arrange with one of her "St. George" friends to take her place.

"No, I won't. I'll wait till you are well. The colonel can go alone—if he chooses."

Sandeman did choose. It was impossible to be annoyed with Olive for being ill, but his restlessness demanded an outlet.

"I have cancelled the car, but I'll join one of the bus parties. I can look around and find out what is worth doing. I dare say the place is worth seeing twice."

He went. The drive over the Atlas mountains provided him with more excitement than he had expected, and the dinner at the *Hôtel de France* at Bir Mousa gave him a sleepless night. He heard the *muezzin's* voice in the grey of the dawn, and the singing of the birds in the fruit trees. Later, he met Ahmed, the fascinating and melancholy Ahmed, who dressed in blue and white, and whose beautiful red leather boots trod softly. Ahmed was tall and black and bearded; he had an inscrutable eye and an air of courteous aloofness. He spoke French. Addressed in English he shrugged with dignity, and gave you to understand that he did not know a word of it.

Sandeman's French was patchy. He formed one of the party conducted by Ahmed round the little oasis town. They visited the mosque and the tomb of a famous marabout, rode on camels—the colonel did not ride—watched an Arab woman weaving, and bought curios, rugs, and carpets. Ahmed sold them the rugs and carpets. He gave them coffee and cigarettes in a picturesque upper room of his house.

The women of the party thought him fascinating. He had such delightful manners, such dignity.

"Yes, hang it," said Sandeman to the only other male in the party, "but he takes our tips. And the fellow must be making quite a lot of money."

"The hotel keeper says he is rich."

"I don't doubt it. Selling all that rubbish to the women. I have noticed that the chap is a bit shy of me."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes. Sly devil. He wanted to keep me out of his house. Suggested I should



She heard a movement, and a voice answered her in English on the other side of the door

he bored. Of course he prefers to deal with women. Men don't react in the same way, you know."

The other male thought that Sandeman was a little unjust to Ahmed.

"Oh, I don't know about that. He didn't worry the women to buy. They seemed in a greater hurry to buy than he was to sell."

"They would be," said Sandeman; "some of them are absolute fools about these swarthy savages. The Garden of Allah, I suppose, and all that."

Sandeman returned safely to Algiers without having purchased a rug or a carpet, but he brought with him two *hoiks* and a packet of picture post cards. At Le Paysage he had to give a complete description of Bir Mousa to an eager Mable, who examined the picture post cards over her coffee and cigarettes.

"Real camels! You can ride on camels?"

"Certainly. They conduct a sort of circus procession round the town and into the desert."

"And did you see Ahmed?"

"I did. A swarthy and stately scoundrel over six feet high, in red leather boots. He will inveigle you and Olive into his house and sell you all sorts of rubbish."

"I don't think Bir Mousa agreed with you."

"The food didn't. The next time we will take our own bread. The local stuff is manufactured from plasticine."

"Plasticine! Poor dear man."

"A mixture of plasticine and plaster-of-paris."

The second expedition to Bir Mousa started a week later in a big, blue Reynaud with a nice little flag fluttering over the bonnet. It was a closed car. The colonel had warned the chauffeur to be careful on the mountain road, but the chauffeur's idea of carefulness was still sufficiently thrilling. They arrived safely at Bir Mousa in time to enjoy the sunset. Mable was in ecstasy. She had seen camels, some baby camels, and Bir Mousa was even better than *Chu Chin Chow*. The old, battered, brown-walled town with its cupolas and minarets and palms lay where the yellow sand met the blue-black mountains.

On arriving at the Hôtel de France, Sandeman sent a message to Ahmed's house, asking the guide to come to the hotel and make arrangements for tomorrow. The Arab returned with the

messenger, to be told by the native porter that the English gentleman and the ladies were in the garden. An old arched doorway flanked by cypresses led into the garden, and as Ahmed passed through it he saw a woman standing under the white blossom of a fruit tree. She was looking at the palms and houses of Bir Mousa outlined against the sunset, and the Arab saw her in profile.

He stood quite still for a moment, and then stepped back behind one of the cypresses. Olive Snell continued to gaze at the sunset, but happening to glance over her shoulder she saw the tall figure of an Arab disappearing through the arched doorway.

A little tiled courtyard lay between the garden and the hotel, and in the courtyard Ahmed and Colonel Sandeman met each other.

"Good evening, Monsieur Ahmed. Are you free to-morrow?"

"Yes, quite free, sir, I think——"

The colonel stared, for Ahmed had replied in English. Moreover, the man had a confused look, and seemed in a hurry to be gone.

"I thought you spoke no English——"

"I am learning a little, sir."

"All right. To-morrow—at ten."

Ahmed bowed to him, and hurrying on, disappeared by a side door leading into the street, and Sandeman, vaguely puzzled, passed on into the garden. And here another surprise awaited him, for Olive was standing just inside the doorway looking almost as white as the fruit blossom.

"Hullo! Don't catch cold."

"Who was that speaking to you?"

"Oh, our guide, Ahmed. I had sent for him."

"A tall man in blue and white?"

"Yes."

Sandeman looked at her anxiously. It was as though something had shocked her.

"What's the matter, my dear girl?"

"Nothing. I have a bit of a head after the long drive. I think I shall go to bed after dinner."

"I'm sorry. You had better order a fire. These places can be horribly cold."

Next morning, after coffee and rolls on the terrace, the three of them waited in the garden for their guide to arrive. It was a superb day, and the desert gleamed

yellow beyond the palms, and the wall-flowers in the garden scented the air. A blackbird sang. Below, where the stream flickered through the palm groves, native women were washing clothes.

Sandeman glanced at his watch.

"Ahmed is late."

Olive remained silent. She felt that Ahmed would not come, and she knew that if he did not come she would know that the voice had not deceived her.

The hotel porter appeared. He addressed himself to Colonel Sandeman.

"Ahmed sends you his regrets, monsieur. He is unwell and in bed—*la grippe*, it seems. I have engaged you another guide."

Sandeman seemed to suspect nothing.

"Very well. What's his name?"

"Ali."

"Is he a good guide?"

"A very good guide, monsieur. He speaks a little English."

Both Sandeman and Mable James noticed that Olive went about Bir Mousa as though she were walking in her sleep. Ali was a little fat man, all smiles and loquacity. He took them to see the weavers, and the tomb of the marabout, and an Arab house, and the palm groves and the river. Mable insisted upon riding a camel, and she kept worrying Ali about rugs and carpets. Where were they to be bought? Was Ahmed the only merchant in Bir Mousa?

Ali assured her that he could produce rugs and carpets that were just as good as Ahmed's. He was jealous of Ahmed, for Ahmed was a Moor, and not a native of Bir Mousa. An interloper!

But would they care to see the mosque?

"Of course. And the view from the roof."

Ali took them to the mosque, and as they were entering it he pointed to the door of a house across the street.

"The house of Ahmed. Yes, it is the best house in Bir Mousa."

He grinned cynically.

"But Ahmed is sick. May Allah comfort him."

They ascended to the roof of the mosque, and while Ali was pointing out the features of the view to an ecstatic Mable and a resigned colonel, Olive went apart and looked down at the house of Ahmed. It was less tall than the mosque; it had a flat roof, a courtyard, and a garden.

Olive could see into the walled garden: it was full of flowers and fruit trees, and it had a seat under the shade of a fig tree. She saw a man walking in the garden, and it was Ahmed himself, Ahmed who was supposed to be ill.

When Ali took them to his house she bought the most expensive rug he had to sell. His little eyes glistened. From that moment she was the great lady, and when—on returning to the Hôtel de France—she made a sign that she wished to speak to him, he rubbed his hands together and was her servant.

"You will have the rug sent to England."

"It shall be done, madame."

She seemed to reflect.

"This evening—I wish to see the sunset from the roof of the mosque. I wish to be alone, not one of a party. Will you arrange it?"

She offered him a hundred-franc note.

"Will that be sufficient?"

Ali looked happy.

"Madame is so very gentle. It shall be arranged. I will have the honour to call here for madame a little before sunset."

Olive was judiciously frank with Mable and Colonel Sandeman. She announced that she was going with the guide to see the sunset, and that she wished to go alone.

Sandeman protested.

"My dear girl, I can't allow it. You can have all the mosque and the sunset to yourself—but I shall escort you there and bring you back."

She looked at him queerly.

"Well—perhaps—it may be something of a sacrifice. Besides, you may have to humour a whim of mine."

"I'll call that privilege," he said.

The sun was nearing one of the great black hills when Ali came to take them to the mosque. Olive was very silent, veiled in aloofness. When the doorkeeper opened the door to them she asked the colonel and Ali to stay below while she ascended by the winding staircase to the roof. There, standing by the parapet, she looked down into the narrow lane and into Ahmed's garden. She saw him walking up and down behind the high, mud wall.

She descended, to find Ali gossiping with the doorkeeper, and Sandeman lighting a cigarette. She spoke to him.

"Please don't ask me any questions. I

want you to take the guide to the top of the lane and wait there. If I do not join you in five minutes, come and look for me."

For the moment Sandeman appeared inclined to play the autocrat, but she looked him full in the eyes and smiled.

"No—please. I have very good reasons. I'll explain them to you presently."

When they had left her alone in the dim and narrow lane she went to a door in the mud wall, for she had noticed while on the roof of the mosque that this door opened into Ahmed's garden. She knocked. Her face was intent, listening, vaguely tender.

"Captain Cartwright!" she called, "Captain Cartwright!"

The garden gave her no answer, but she fancied that she had heard the sound of secret footsteps, and presently she called again, but this time her challenge was more intimate.

"Captain Cartwright—Rollo——"

She heard a movement, and a voice answered her in English on the other side of the door.

"Who's there?"

She touched the door.

"Rollo—don't you know my voice? I knew yours——"

"Olive!"

And then he spoke swiftly.

"Please go away. I'm Ahmed here. I had to begin again."

"But, Rollo, I have news for you. Colonel Babercombe shot himself two years ago. Hadn't you heard?"

"Good heavens! One hears nothing here. I'd cut myself off——"

"He left a letter in which he told the truth. It vindicated you, Rollo. I always knew—somehow—that it would happen. Now, won't you open the door Rollo, please?"

Colonel Sandeman, returning rather fussily at the end of his five minutes, was shocked to see Olive in the arms of an Arab.

"My dear Miss Snell!"

"Oh, don't be angry with me, dear man. This—is Captain Cartwright. I have found him."

"Well I'm hanged!" said Sandeman.



FULFILMENT

LET not the years weigh heavy on your shoulders.
I am the hills. Look up and rest your eyes.
I am the dawn upon the highest boulders,
Flaming with hope for you, O dear and wise.

I am the wind that winnows through the gloaming,
I am the paths of courage for your feet,
I am the quiet stars that guide your homing
On the last trail, O beautiful and sweet!

And when they say that death true hearts can sever
Laugh at their folly. Tell them that you know
Your lover lives forever and forever,
Stronger to hold you now than long ago!

MARION FRANCIS BROWN

Mr. Indifference

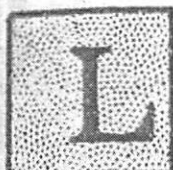
THE STORY-TELLER

July 1923

17

By Warwick Deeping

"One of them caught the Englishman by the collar, but the moment the fellow's rough knuckles pressed themselves into Stearn's throat an extraordinary transfiguration was seen in him. His yellow head seemed to blaze with the fury of a Norse Berserk. His throat swelled; his big chest and shoulders spread themselves. These common men had dared to touch him!"



LAWRENCE STEARN was bored.

Nino, his Italian servant, had carried his two chairs out into the loggia, set the coffee, cigars, and matches on the table beside him, and left this child of English apathy to smoke and to meditate over the dullness of life.

Stearn's villa overlooked the lake. It was the end of May and a day of sunshine after rain, and yet—so utterly can *ennui* blind a man, that Stearn saw none of the beauty of water, woods, and mountains, or if he saw it it was no more to him than confectionery in a pastrycook's window. He was too well off; he had no work to do; never had he been at grips with life or used with fierceness the strength of that big, blond body. He had grown a little supercilious, quite kindly supercilious, gently patronizing. There was no bitterness in him. He was a big, overfed mastiff who had been allowed to lie about on sofas.

The Englishman looked at the blue lake with the Austrian steamers upon it. They seemed very busy today, but their paddle-wheels stirred none of his curiosity. There was a thrill in the air, movement, but he did not feel it, nor had he noticed the trembling of Nino's hand when the lad had placed the coffee cup on the table. These amiable little monkeys were chattering about war, liberty, the resurrection of Italy, but at the sight of the first white

uniform they would run away! War, yes! Stearn had read all about it in the English papers. There might be some scrapping further south between the French and the Austrians, but the large Englishman had no intention of being disturbed.

Nino reappeared in the loggia.

"You will not be wanting me, sir?"

"No."

The lad's eyes were like light on flickering water.

"I go down to get the news. They say that he is coming—that is he over there."

"And who is 'he'?" asked the Englishman.

"Why—Garibaldi."

"Oh, that famous filibuster! Well, run along, boy."

Nino went, and Stearn smoked a second cigar and wondered whether Mrs. Calvert would drive down that afternoon. Also, should he ask her to marry him, or should he not? She glistened; she seemed to make a little sparkle in a very dull world; she was a widow, and she would not expect him to discover a lot of boring sentimentality. It was not necessary to explain things to Chloe Calvert, and she was most deucedly amusing.

"I like her red hair," he thought.

And her eyes, yes! What a queer colour they are, just the colour of that tawny old villa down there where the Italian doctor lived. Stearn looked at the villa. It stood below him, framed between two of the stone pillars and the vine leaves of the loggia, its walls of old gold standing out against the blue of the

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lake. Much of it was shrouded by trees, ilex, pine, cypress. He could see bits of the queer stone roof, a white balustrade, the brown shutters. It occurred to him that it must be rather beastly for an educated Italian to have to live under prying tyranny of a foreign power, especially when he had a daughter. The daughter, too, was pretty—at least, he fancied someone had spoken of her as being pretty, one of those little, warm-skinned, pansy-eyed women, gentle and quite negligible. A flower for a boy's buttonhole. Just that!

Lawrence Stearn heard the sound of carriage wheels, and he leant forward so that he could see the road. A yellow-wheeled vettura was drawing up outside his gate, and a red parasol bloomed like a red flower under the overhanging bows of the ilexes. Stearn remembered that Nino had gone out, and removing his long legs from the chair on which they rested, he got up, and descended the steps that led down from the loggia into the garden. A voice was telling the vetturino to wait; it was the voice of Chloe Calvert.

He met her at the gate. They smiled at each other with the cynical and humorous tolerance of two hypercritical worldlings.

"What a shame! I have dragged you out of your chair."

He laughed lazily.

"No, it was a case of free will. I was feeling bored. Your chariot wheels have rolled it away."

He stood aside, inviting her in, and looking down at her from his great height with an air of indolent approval. She was dressed in white, and the sunlight diffusing itself through her red parasol threw a gentle warmth upon her pale, cold face. She was unusual; an ivory figure with mischievous tawny eyes, sweetly sophisticated, the sort of woman who piques the man whose soul has lost its freshness. She was ice, a creature of northern lights, not fire.

"You nice lazy giant."

She smiled up at him slantwise as they strolled back through the garden to the loggia. She liked him; his indolence and his good nature were in contrast to her own glitter and swiftness; their personalities mixed very well, and she believed that he would never marry her with awkward illusions.

"I have come to ask you to do me a favour. Can you bear it?"

"Dear lady, look at my shoulders! Please sit down."

He made her take the chair he had vacated, and pillow her little white-shod feet on the other chair. He was amused. She seemed to purr like a sleek white cat.

"There's the *dolce far niente*. Now, what can I do for you? My monkey Nino has scampered down to the town. They are all mad about somebody called Garibaldi."

"Oh, the fellow who breathes garlic and heroics!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"The fact is—my girl Rose is ill; a little fever or something. I wondered if you would go down to the doctor, who lives in that yellow band-box down there, and tell him to come and see her. My Italian is a little thin."

"Of course."

He stood and smiled.

"You will not run away?"

"No."

"Or float away. You look like a bit of thistle-down."

"Really," she said, "you must not over-exert yourself! I can't allow it."

He laughed.

With his hands in the coat pockets of his velveteen jacket he strolled down through the garden to the road. The vetturino had drawn his horse under the shade of the ilexes, and appeared to be dozing on his seat. A half company of Austrian infantry came down the road, kicking up the dust with their heavy boots, and Stearn stood aside to let them pass. He looked at them casually, with a sort of amiable con-

tempt, these Croats who were no more than cattle, save that the smell and the heat of them were unpleasant. Some of the men stared at him. Their dislike of Stearn was instinctive. He was far too English to bother his head with wondering whether such savages disliked him or not.

He crossed the road and entered the gate of the doctor's garden, his hands still in his jacket pockets, his shoulders slouched under their load of indolence and *ennui*. The garden was full of roses, and the smell of them was very sweet after the rain. Stearn saw the label of marble with the doctor's name, "Dr. Luigi Bertani," carved on it; this small slab was fastened to the wall above the bell-handle.

Stearn rang the bell.

He stood with his back to the closed door, looking up at the loggia of his own villa and smiling tolerantly at his own thoughts. He was in no hurry to get back to Chloe Calvert; he was in no hurry to get anywhere, but—after all—they were taking a deuced long time to answer the bell. He wheeled slowly round and rang again. Nothing happened. He rang it a third time, and with such vigour that he could hear the bell giving tongue like an alarmed dog somewhere in the deeps of the yellow house. He turned his back again on the door and waited.

"Confound it! The fellow can never have had any patients."

And then a queer feeling stole over him, a feeling that he was not alone, that he was being looked at by a pair of eyes. He turned sharply and found that the door had been opened without his hearing it, opened just three inches, and in the slit he saw the eyes, nose, and mouth of a girl's face.

Stearn bowed.

"I beg your pardon, but I have a message for Dr. Bertani."

She opened the door another inch.

"Oh, it is the English signore," she said, rather irrelevantly Stearn thought.

And then he realized that she was afraid. Her eyes showed it; her bosom showed it, as did the fingers of the hand which gripped the edge of the door. But she was the mistress of her fear; it might crucify her, but she would not cry out.

Stearn was conscious of a curious shock of sympathy.

"I am afraid that I have disturbed you, Signorina Bertani, but the English lady who is staying at the Villa Julia——"

"My father is ill," she said quickly and as though she were short of breath.

Her eyes looked steadily into his. She had one of those soft, glowing Italian faces, eyes like black velvet and hair like black silk, a soft, gentle creature in whom the fire of life would never burn very fiercely. At least, that is what Stearn thought.

"I am sorry," he said. "Will it be quite impossible for Dr. Bertani to visit the English lady's maid?"

"Dr. Bertani is ill in bed."

Her round eyes seemed willing him to believe what she told him.

"That settles it, signorina. I'm afraid I rang your bell rather loudly. I hope your father will soon be well."

He bowed, stepped back, half turned away, and then paused to look at her over his shoulder.

"Can I help you in any way—send a message?"

Her face remained utterly serious.

"No, thank you, nothing."

She closed the door, and as he walked away he heard her shoot the bolts.

Lawrence Stearn recrossed the road, re-entered his own gate, and made his way back to the loggia. "What was the girl afraid of?" he thought, but he could find no other explanation for her fear than her dread of discovering an Austrian soldier on the doorstep. Was it as bad as that for the women of Italy? The good-humoured cynic in him shrugged its shoulders, but though he did not trouble to admit it, his

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visit to Dr. Bertani's villa had dissipated some of his indolence and his boredom. He found Mrs. Calvert turning over the papers of an English journal which had been lying upon the table.

"I'm sorry. Dr. Bertani is ill in bed."

She looked annoyed.

"Bother the man; how inconvenient of him. I shall have to drive down into Como and get hold of another man."

"Let me go for you?"

"Will you?"

"Of course. I can take your carriage and bring him back here, and you can drive him on to the Villa Julia."

Stearn went for a hat, and, waking up Mrs. Calvert's vetturino, drove down into Como. It struck him at once that something unusual was happening in the town, for he found it swarming with Austrian troops, and his carriage was held up by a tangle of guns and baggage wagons. He noticed that there were very few civilians in the streets. Doors and shutters were closed, and the whole town had an atmosphere of fear and of suspense; from behind its closed shutters it watched the Austrians in the streets, hoping, fearing, holding its breath.

Stearn found his carriage stopped by a picket. He was ordered out of it by a corporal whose blue eyes were red and angry. The man spoke German.

"Who are you? What do you want here?"

Stearn laughed.

"I am English. I have come for a doctor for an English lady who lives up there. I am in a hurry."

"I shall arrest you," said the corporal.

Again, Stearn laughed.

"Nonsense. You will find yourself in trouble if you do. Where is your officer?"

An infantry lieutenant came up at this moment, and Stearn appealed to him.

"I am an Englishman. I had

driven down for a doctor; someone is ill, and your corporal threatens to arrest me. I shall be much obliged if you will give me a pass."

The officer was polite, but he would issue no passes. He put the corporal into Stearn's carriage with orders to drive him to the doctor's house, produce the doctor, deliver him at the Villa Julia, and see that he returned.

"I am sorry, but this is war. Every Italian in the place is an infernal spy."

So Stearn returned to his villa with the Austrian corporal and a fat and rather frightened little man who kept taking off his hat and mopping a moist forehead. The doctor sat there mutely, with eyes bulging, rather like a pathetic frog, refusing to open his mouth or to utter a sound. Stearn was amused. The whole affair seemed a great joke, quite farcical, and he refused to take it seriously. When they reached the villa he went up and explained the situation to Mrs. Calvert, as though they had got mixed up in some melodrama.

"Perhaps I had better drive up with you and sit beside the corporal."

She laughed at the idea.

"Oh, nonsense! We are sacred people, you know. I'll tip the brute handsomely."

He conducted her to her carriage and spoke to the corporal in German.

"Her Excellency permits you to drive with her. Please put your musket under the seat. She does not like the sight of firearms."

Stearn returned to his chairs in the loggia, and since the afternoon had developed its full heat, he went to sleep. He woke about five o'clock, glanced at his watch, and rang the hand-bell for Nino, but no Nino appeared, and he had to gather up his largeness and go in search of someone else. He entered the villa and shouted for Nino's mother, who was also the cook.

"Maria—Maria."

There was no Nino and no Maria, and half a minute's opening and shutting of doors proved to him that the Italians had bolted, and that he was alone in the house. He was annoyed. He would get no tea, and it seemed probable that he would get no dinner.

It was about half-past five when Stearn heard the tramp of feet in the road below, a harsh word of command, and the clatter and grounding of muskets. He sat up. Some dozen Austrian soldiers were filing through the gateway of Dr. Bertani's villa; he saw half the party pass round the house and disappear, while the rest gathered in a group by the door. A sergeant rang the bell. There was silence.

Stearn became interested.

"Billeted there," he thought. "Rather beastly for that girl with her father ill."

Then he leant forward; he got up. The sergeant had had no luck with the bell, and two of the soldiers were hammering on the door with the butts of their muskets. Stearn's eyebrows bristled slightly. He stepped to the front of the loggia, waved, and shouted in German.

"Hallo! If you want billets come over here. There is someone ill in that house."

They paid not the least attention, and it is doubtful whether they heard him, owing to the racket they were making on the door with the butts of their muskets, and a moment later Stearn realized that it was not a question of looking for billets. One of the soldiers had a pioneer's axe slung to his belt, and at a sign from the sergeant he began to split open the panels of the door. Two rents in the woodwork allowed an arm to be thrust through to reach the bolts. The door was conquered, and the group of white figures disappeared into the house.

Stearn stood and pulled his moustache. His blue eyes were set in a stare. His face had lost its look of indifference, and the droop was out of his shoulders.

"What the devil!"

He saw the other "white-coats" reappear from behind the house and stand grouped about the doorway. Stearn's supposition was that they were arresting Dr. Bertani, and he waited to see what would happen. He felt uncomfortable, most decidedly uncomfortable. That girl with the soft eyes alone in there with all those soldiers! He had a feeling that he ought to do something, he—a citizen—of the most orderly and humane country in Europe. He was moved to cross the road like a big London policeman and put an end to this business with a solemn: "Move on, there. This is a private house. Clear out, and respect the lady."

Suddenly he saw the sergeant and his men reappear, but without the civilian figure of Dr. Bertani. The sergeant said something to the men; there was laughter; the men shouldered their muskets and trooped out into the road. But the sergeant remained, and two privates with him.

Lawrence Stearn could not escape from the conviction that he ought to satisfy himself that Dr. Bertani's daughter was in no danger and that she was being properly treated by the men. He strolled down through the garden and across the road, thinking that it might be possible to persuade the gentlemen to take up their quarters in his villa, where a bottle of wine and a few cigars might put them in a Christian temper. Like most Englishmen he flattered himself on his ability to handle men, whether they were black, white, or yellow.

He entered the garden of Dr. Bertani's villa and walked up to the door. He found that it had been bolted, but by slipping his hand through the split panel he was able to draw back the bolts and make his way into the house. Its silence impressed him. He stood in the dark yet rather spacious hall and looked at the closed doors and at the marble staircase winding its way to

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the floors above, and as he stood there a strange feeling stole over him that he had walked into another world. He seemed to have left his other self out there in the evening sunlight. The Lawrence Stearn who stood listening in the hall of this silent villa was another and a different man.

A shiver of excitement passed up his spine. Something was happening in this silent house; he was sure of it, though he could hear nothing. He felt it, a most strange and inexplicable sensation, as though some other soul's fear and anguish were calling him—touching him. His hair bristled like a dog's; his blue eyes began to glare.

Methodically, almost with deliberation, he opened the doors opening from the hall, only to find the rooms empty. He returned to the staircase and began to ascend, moving with the lithe and easy swiftness of a wild man, reproducing in his nineteenth-century self the likeness of some Norse ancestor of a thousand years ago. His big body had lost all its slackness; his head had become the head of some glowing, tawny, fierce-eyed yarl.

He reached the landing and stood tense, listening. The silence was extraordinary; it baffled him, contradicted his belief that something brutal and vile was happening in the house. For a moment his normal, indolent, civilized self reasserted its authority. The droop returned to his shoulders. He hesitated.

Then he heard a voice, the voice of a man.

"Come on, tell us the truth," it said in bad Italian; "we are going to have it—sooner or later."

There was a moment's silence, which was broken by a half-mothered cry of pain.

"Oh, madre, madre!"

Stearn walked straight into the room. It was a long room with three windows overlooking the lake, a big bed at one end of it opposite the marble fireplace and the large gold

frame mirror. Two soldiers lounged on chairs by the windows. The girl lay on the bed and lashed down to it by a couple of sheets, and Stearn guessed that she had been struggling, for the coverlet was all twisted and raised in folds under her feet. The sergeant was leaning over the lower end of the wooden bed, his naked bayonet in his right hand. He had been pricking the girl's feet.

Stearn's eyes blazed, but for the moment he was immensely calm. He saw everything, the three muskets piled in the corner nearest to the door, the astonished faces of the two fellows opposite him, the wrinkles on the sergeant's red and brutal neck, the wide eyes of the girl.

"Damn you!" he said. "Damn you!"

The sergeant turned on him, grinning, ugly.

"Who are you? What the devil—?"

Stearn spoke to him in German, very indifferent German, but his face said more than his tongue.

"So you torture women, do you? Get out of the house—you damned scoundrels."

He waved a big arm towards the door. He never doubted but that these men would obey him; he was an English gentleman, very angry, but wholly master of himself and of his dignity.

The sergeant said something to the two soldiers; in fact, he ordered them to throw Stearn down the stairs, and they set about the doing of it with a good will and an energy that were to prove catastrophic. One of them caught the Englishman by the collar, but the moment the fellow's rough knuckles pressed themselves into Stearn's throat an extraordinary transfiguration was seen in him. His yellow head seemed to blaze with the fury of a Norse Baresark. His throat swelled; his big chest and shoulders spread themselves. These common men had dared to touch him!

He floored one with a blow in the face, caught the other by the collar and flung him against the wall, but that was no more than the opening of the dance. A jab, a deep roar of Norse anger, and the sergeant's bayonet was sticking in the flesh of Stearn's right arm. Next moment Stearn had him by the throat, with his back half broken across the wooden floor-board of the bed. But the other men were up and on him. He flung them off, only to see a second bayonet drawn, and the other fellow diving for the corner where the muskets stood. Stearn picked up a chair, a chair of solid Italian walnut, and for a few seconds the room seemed to hold one huge and devastating figure that whirled and struck with a wooden club. The gilt-framed mirror was smashed, the furniture overturned, but the final tableau showed a yellow-maned Norseman standing alone in the room, the one remaining leg of the chair gripped in his right hand, the three crumpled "white-coats" lying like inert sacks about the floor.

The Norse fury melted out of Stearn as swiftly as it had entered him. He went to the bed and released the girl. She sat up; she was deadly pale, yet mistress of a tragic and simple dignity.

"Thank you, signore. If you had not come——"

She looked at the men.

"Are they dead?"

"They will not trouble us for a moment," he said grimly; "but I must get you out of this. Some of the others may come back."

She nodded, and her eyes were on his blood-soaked sleeve and red right hand; he had forgotten his flesh wound, but she remembered it.

"I must see to that."

She stood up, and seeing her wince he remembered her wounded feet.

"Signorina, you cannot walk!"

She smiled, steadied herself.

"On the contrary, I can walk quite well. My shoes? Oh, they are here. Please come with me, signore; there are bandages and

dressings in my father's room below."

She put on her shoes, and though the doing of it must have hurt her, walked without flinching to the door.

"Signorina, you have courage. But—one moment——"

He gave her a bow and the homage of his blue eyes, and then possessed himself of one of the muskets, a cartridge bag, and bayonet, pitching the rest of the arms out of a window into the garden. The three Austrians showed no signs of life, and Stearn locked the door on them and pocketed the key.

"Now, signorina, please take my arm."

But she would not be helped. She led him to one of the rooms on the ground floor, her father's room, and there she brought water, cut the sleeve of his coat, and dressed his arm. She was very calm, gentle, capable, and Stearn, watching her fingers at work, felt what no other woman had made him feel before.

He asked her why the Austrians had entered the villa, and she raised her dark eyes and told him the truth.

"My father is a patriot. He escaped last night across the lake to take news and money to Garibaldi. He was under suspicion. We agreed that I should pretend that he was ill—for he could not take me with him—and we thought they might respect the house. But you see——"

She turned her head to listen. From above came the sound of an angry man shaking a locked door.

"Ah! they are awake again. Go back to your villa, signore. But no—they will arrest you!"

She had fastened the bandage, and Stearn stood up. The Norse light had come back into his eyes.

"Signorina, the affair is mine; it belongs to me. Come."

He took her by the arm, and she did not resist. In fact, something seemed to pass from his big body into hers, a tenderness that became in her a gentle yet stately yielding, a feeling of fateful trust. They

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went out into the garden, and as far as the gate, and here Stearn put out a cautious head to survey the road. It was empty.

"Quick—run——"

They made a dash across the road, hand in hand, and, reaching the gate of Stearn's villa, were safe among the shadows of the trees. But here her fortitude failed her for a moment, for the path was of rough pebbles that hurt her wounded feet.

"Oh, Madonna!"

She winced. Stearn had one glimpse of her white lips and set face. She made herself smile.

"It is nothing."

The next moment he had picked her up and was carrying her in his arms.

"Forgive me. May I be shot if you walk another step."

He carried her into his villa, but this was only a resting-place, for Stearn knew that when one of those battered Austrians broke out and raised the alarm this villa of his would be the first to be searched. And then he remembered Mrs. Calvert, and it was with a shock of surprise that he realized that he wished to make use of Mrs. Calvert, not to marry her. If he could prevail upon her to take Dr. Bertani's daughter into her villa and hide her there she would be safe.

There was a mule path running through the olive groves at the back of the villa, and Stearn knew that it passed close to Chloe Calvert's garden.

"Child," he said, "there is only one thing that I can think of, the English lady's house. Shall I take you there?"

She reflected a moment, looked at him with consenting eyes and nodded.

It was Mrs. Calvert's custom to take her dinner on the terrace of her villa under a canopy of vines, and she was in the middle of the meal when the two astonishing figures appeared at the top of the flight of steps leading down from the garden. A wild-headed man with his right

arm wrapped in bandages was carrying a girl down the steps, and halfway down them one of the girl's shoes fell off, and the man—still holding the girl in his arms—bent down and recovered it. Mrs. Calvert saw him tuck the shoe into his pocket and smile down into the girl's face.

Mrs. Calvert stood up. She was not pleased. Her face had a bleached look.

"My dear Lawrence!" she said. "What—has—happened?"

Stearn smiled at her, the absurd creature with his head of tawny hair. Very carefully he laid Dr. Bertani's daughter in one of the long, cane chairs.

"I want you to help me, Chloe. I know you will do it when I tell you all that has happened."

She had to listen to his rigmarole—his sudden enthusiasm, his unrealized tenderness. She looked at the girl, and she looked at Stearn. She saw them smile at each other, the absurd smile of two very young things who have entered upon the great adventure. She—with all her wit and her sparkle—was no more than a pillar of salt, Lot's wife.

And then she smiled. It was a very icy smile, but it materialized.

"Why, of course."

Stearn's blue eyes beamed on her.

"I knew you would," he said; "you are just the woman to do it."

What idiots men were, but what compelling idiots!

"And you?" she asked. "What is going to happen to you, my dear Lawrence?"

He laughed, gave a shrug of the shoulders, and looked at the girl in the chair.

"Oh, I suppose I may as well do the thing thoroughly. This Garibaldi fellow is over there. I have left a musket hidden in your bushes. I shall get across the lake and turn soldier."

"You great silly," said the lady.

But into her eyes crept something that had the mystery of tears.

WARWICK DEEPING.

THAT ONE-LEGGED DEVIL

By WARWICK DEEPING

A SOUTH SEAS CINDERELLA—AN AMAZING PRINCE



HE was big, swarthy, smiling and rather silent, and he came ashore at Kia-whaka with an old leather kit-bag and an artificial leg. He carried the one and he wore the other. On the bag were two black letters, R. E. His name was Robert Earnshaw.

On the jetty he put down the bag, lit a cigarette and had a look at Kia-whaka. From the sea the place had a certain beauty, lying brown and white along the blue of its bay with the deep green hills behind it, but it was the beauty of a woman who becomes frowsy and sinister when examined at closer quarters. At night, with its lights making eyes at the sea, it had the veiled lure of a dim and mischievous face at a window. Earnshaw scrutinized it. Kia-whaka had two hotels, warehouses, quays with some nondescript shipping lying at them. It was hot; a moist oven of a place, and it suggested odours.

"Well, you never know!" thought the one-legged man. "The dirtier the shop the better the business. It is like that sometimes."

A dark-skinned loafer came up and offered to carry Bob Earnshaw's bag. He nodded.

"The clean hotel—if there is one."

"Both clean, sah."

"All right; I'll chance the nearest."

The bag-carrier conducted him to Mallaby's hotel where a huge, red, ex-coriated and perspiring man sat drinking on the veranda. The loafer set the bag down and indicated the red man as being Mr. Bud Mallaby, the owner of the hotel.

"I want a room, a clean room," said Robert Earnshaw.

The big man's shirt was open, and the red hair showed on his chest. He did not move. He looked at Earnshaw with truculent attention, and Earnshaw knew at once that he disliked this red hulk as much as he had disliked anything he had ever seen.

"All my rooms are clean. See?"

"I should like to see," said Bob, smiling that easy smile of his.

The big man bellowed.

"Sarah! Hallo—you!"

A native woman came waddling out, looking frightened, for everyone in Kia-whaka was afraid of Mr. Mallaby.

"Show this guy a room."

He threw a "take it or leave it" look at Earnshaw and reached for his glass, and Earnshaw—still smiling—followed Sarah into the house.

"I may as well see the place," he thought, "before I sling across to the other hutch. I can come out and tell that sore-head that his rooms—are—dirty."

But he did neither, for in passing the open doorway of a room whose windows looked out on to the greenness of a garden he saw a girl sitting by the window, sewing. She was the last sort of girl he might have expected to see in such a place. She was fair, white, and comely, with darkish eyes and a red and pleading mouth. She looked up at him as he went past, and her eyes suggested fear, eyes which watched for the thing she feared to happen, and for some quite impossible chance of escape.

He paused, half involuntarily, and the native woman threw a quick glance back at him over her shoulder.

"Eyes front!" it said. "You had better be careful."

Earnshaw followed her up the stairs. He did not ask her who the girl was, for he knew that he would find out.

Having inspected his room and satisfied himself that it was reasonably clean, he had his bag brought up, and then made his way back to the veranda. In passing the doorway of the room where the girl sat sewing he noticed that someone had closed the door, and the closed door was not without significance.

Bud Mallaby was still lounging on the veranda, but he had a companion—a brown, yellow and white man with flat eyes and a sneaky smile, one Mister Malua, who controlled much property in the interior.

Bob Earnshaw sat down, adjusting his artificial leg.

"Quite all right, thanks," he said. "But I don't believe in too much optimism, you know."

The red man grunted.

"Same here," he said rudely.

Earnshaw sat and smiled. He tried to make conversation about Kiawhaka, but he was quick to realize that Mr. Mallaby and his yellow friend regarded his presence as superfluous. They had an air of loving each other, and Earnshaw began to suspect that he had interrupted an affectionate and intimate gossip. They stared at him, and smoked, and sipped their drinks, and were silent. He noticed that the yellow man had several rings on his fingers, and rings on a male hand were an offence to Earnshaw.

Presently, he rose with leisureliness, gave a flick to his artificial leg, and limped down the veranda steps.

"Guess I'll have a look round! So long, gentlemen!"

They watched him move away; he walked slowly, and almost with a suggestion of effort. Mister Malua turned his flat eyes on the hotel-keeper; they contained an interrogation, and they were jealous.

"Who's dat guy?"

"Don't know him from Adam. Came by the boat. Some dawg after a cheap bore. Phut!"

The red man spat, and moved a hand to and fro, palm downwards.

"A wash-out, a lame duck. Somebody's tout."

Malua hitched his chair nearer.

"I no like him. He has a smile, the sort of smile which gets a woman."

Mallaby laughed.

"But not my girl. No one-legged moucher like that! She's in a glass case. She's the goods. Bless you, if you are so mighty nervous, you can put your cards on the table."

He looked into the yellow man's flat eyes.

"But girls in glass cases are some speculation. I know her value. See?"

Robert Earnshaw had come to Kiawhaka to do business, to discover if there was anything in Kiawhaka to be exploited, but in three days he had discovered that the brain of Kiawhaka was either fuddled or asleep, that it was not a white man's town, and that white men did not prosper there. They grew sluggish and limp and putty-coloured. They sank into chairs and hammocks and ceased to function. The trade of the place and the energy thereof slid into the clammy hands of such gentlemen as Mister Malua, in whom the climate could not debauch what their mothers had given them.

But Bob Earnshaw discovered much

more than this. He discovered Mary Mallaby and fell in love with her.

The soft, frightened whiteness of her and her dark and hunted eyes had caught him at the first glance. From the very first he had a feeling that she was a bird in a cage; and when he learnt the truth about her, as learn it he did, that smile of his grew less easy and boyish.

It was the little pock-marked Scotchman at the store who explained the situation to him.

"She's up for sale. It's a peety some lad does not shoot that father of hers."

It appeared that Mallaby—Kiawhaka's bully—was what he looked, a man who cared for nothing but his drink and his various coloured concubines. He was beyond the limit of decent men's scheme of humanity. This reprobate was nothing but an evil, excoriated, greedy body. He kept this girl of his like a bird in a cage, or like a sweet white morsel to be sold to someone who had an appetite and money. He was a terror. He had beaten several men who had been a little bold in their pertinacity. The girl was afraid of him; too much afraid even to run away.

"God, what a swine!" said the one-legged man.

He meditated.

"And who's the love-merchant with the boodle, if there is one?"

"A yellow dog—one Malua."

"What, that flat-eyed half-caste! You mean the man will marry the girl to that?"

Sandy nodded.

"He oozes dollars. He'll have to part to Mallaby."

"I'll queer that pitch," said Robert Earnshaw.

He went back to the hotel.

"This isn't a white man's place," he reflected; "and less of a white woman's. It's greasy and rancid and debauched. If I don't dig her out of this I'm not the man I thought I was."

The girl was watched like a sacred image, but not so closely that a lover of enterprise could not come near her, especially when she, too, was trembling to think of him as a lover. Mallaby may have grown over-confident. A man with one leg seemed a negligible quantity, and not the bold boy to bolt with a prize.

There were secret glances, passings in the passage-ways, a smile, a glimmer of the eyes, backward looks, a word here and there. They were ripe for it before they fell into each other's arms one day when Mallaby was out on his pony and the native ladies were gossiping in the kitchen. Bob held her hard and fast, and her face

was a thing of exquisite and melting rapture.

"Mary, you have got to marry me!"

She had let herself plunge into the joy of this man's love for her, this white man with his galliard smile. She had not thought of the afterwards, and marriage was very much an afterwards and it re-introduced her father. The fear came back into her eyes.

"I daren't," she said.

"But—I—dare," he reassured her.

She looked up at him with a glimmer of hope.

"You see, my father——"

"Girl," he said, stroking her hair, "I know all about that. You are not going to marry that yellow dog while I have one leg left."

"You are rich, Bob; you can"—and then she went red and hid her face—"you can buy me! A nice word for a woman to use!"

"No, I'm not rich, and I'm not going to buy you. You hold tight on to me."

When Mallaby returned he found Bob Earnshaw sitting on the veranda and looking as pleasant as a full-sized angel.

"Good day, boss. I'm dying to have a word with you."

Mallaby had handed his pony over to a boy, and he came and spread himself in one of the cane chairs.

"Well, what's on?"

"A bit of romance, that's all. I want to marry your daughter."

Mary's father made no immediate comment on this surprising piece of news. His face seemed to grow a little more red and turgid, and he lay back and looked Bob Earnshaw over with an air of pre-occupied curiosity. He made play with a silver toothpick. It was, of course, possible that the one-legged man had money.

"Oh, you do, do you?" he said.

Bob smiled at him.

"Any objection, boss?"

"Got any money?"

"Not a bean. I'm out to make some."

That settled it. Mr. Mallaby sat up in his chair and pointed with his toothpick towards the veranda steps.

"Here, you fade away, quick! Go and pack your bag and clear. My girl's not for a one-legged guy without a bean. Clear! And if I catch you round this place I'll give you a welting that will last you till Christmas."

Bob got up.

"That sounds pretty definite, boss. I take it you won't change your mind?"

"Mafeesh!" said the red man, and spat.

Earnshaw looked as mild as milk. He went in to pack his bag, but before doing it he opened the door of Mary's sitting-room and found her waiting there alone.

"Your father's not exactly pleased about it. I'm to clear. I'm going over to the opposition hotel, not because I'm afraid of your father, girl, but because the mail-boat isn't due for a week."

She looked at him with her frightened eyes.

"Oh, Bob, you're leaving me!"

"Not a bit of it. I'm leaving with you."

He jerked the door open, saw that there was no one about, and reclosed the door.

"You are coming on that mail-boat with me, Mary. You're of age. We'll get married in Sydney."

"Bob, I daren't," she said. "He's a devil. He might kill you."

She glanced at his artificial leg, and Earnshaw understood why she was afraid. She would have no use for a man who could not thrash her father.

"Oh, that's all right, girl!" he said.

"I'm a bit of a devil myself." He kissed her. "Now, I shall be hanging about, and the day the mail-boat puts in you'll come for a walk with me to Sandy Hook. You'll have to give them the slip. Promise?"

She trembled, but she promised.

"Perhaps he won't touch a lame man, Bob."

"Girl," said her man, "you just wait and see how lame I am."

He packed his bag and strolled out, and on the veranda he saw Mister Malua talking to Bud Mallaby.

"Good day, boss. What about the bill?"

"It's here," said Mary's father.

Earnshaw paid it.

"Well, it ain't exactly the Ritz, but I've been fairly comfortable here, boss, thank you. We'll draw a veil over our little difference of opinion."

"You'd better keep it drawn," grunted the other with red truculence.

Mr. Robert Earnshaw transferred himself to Potter's Hotel. Mr. Potter was a little man who was timid, but whose ideals were fierce, and his happiest dream was that he had Mallaby by the throat and was shaking the life out of him. Earnshaw found a friend in Mr. Potter, and Mr. Potter gave him some very good advice.

For the next few days Bob Earnshaw was seen hobbling about Kiawhaka leaning on two stout sticks. He had discarded his artificial leg, and the empty trouser-leg was pinned up upon itself. He laboured

round rather clumsily, looking the most helpless and inoffensive of creatures. More than once he passed Mallaby's hotel, and Mallaby, spread upon the veranda, eyed him with casual scorn.

"Lost your cork leg, buck?"

Earnshaw paused and explained.

"This old stump of mine gets painful sometimes, boss, and I have to drop the penny in the slot machine."

"Got it chewed off by a shark, I suppose?"

"No, a German 'crump' in the Hindenberg line. I was a captain bloke at the time."

Mallaby made it plain that he did not believe him.

"Sure you weren't a flash field-marshal?" he sneered.

Earnshaw laughed.

"In the next war give me something cushy."

He moved away on his one leg and two sticks, but Mallaby called after him.

"Say, my daughter is to be married next week. You may like to come to the wedding."

"I'll be there, boss, sure as fate!"

It was Mr. Potter who happened to be out early one morning on the road to Sandy Hook and who saw a sight which was surprising. A man was undressing under cover of the scrub just above the beach, and as Mr. Potter rode along he saw a white figure flash away across the sand. It was a one-legged figure, superbly limbed and with the shoulders of a boxer, and it moved with great leaping hops. Mr. Potter was astounded, for the figure's activity was amazing. It leaped and turned and pivoted on that one leg with perfect grace and balance. It plunged into the sea. It swam. It emerged and recrossed the sand with those same powerful leaps, swinging its arms and singing.

Mr. Potter's eyes twinkled.

"Great snakes," he observed, "who would have thought it!"

From that moment he became Bob Earnshaw's backer, ready to further the romance in every way that was possible, and to use the underworld of Kiawhaka for the gathering of information. Mister Malua hung round Mallaby's hotel all day as though to make sure of the bird in the cage. A native woman slept with Mary Mallaby, and her father took the key of her door to bed with him. She was to marry the yellow dog on the Wednesday, and it was said that she had resigned herself to the inevitable.

Bob looked grim yet amused.

"Suppose there's no doubt about the boat calling on Monday?"

"Sure as hell!" said Mr. Potter. "The consul has had a wireless from her."

On the Sunday Bob hobbled round to Mallaby's hotel, and by bribing someone, managed to have speech with Mary. Mallaby, Mister Malua and one or two more were snoring in the shade of the veranda.

"Sandy Hook at four o'clock to-morrow, girl. Slip out when they are taking their siesta. I'll wait for you half-way along the beach."

"What are you going to do?" she asked him.

"Don't you worry, sweetheart. You'll be aboard that boat to-morrow evening."

"But why must I come to Sandy Hook, Bob?"

"Why? Because I'm going to hold a sort of peace conference there, and I shall want you to witness the treaty."

"I don't understand."

"You will, girl, to-morrow. I must have my swipe at the bridegroom."

"But he carries a knife!"

"He can carry twenty knives, for all I care."

All Monday morning Bob Earnshaw lay on Mr. Potter's veranda with a spy-glass across his knees, watching the blue horizon for the coming of the mail-boat; and about noon he saw a little smudge of smoke where sky and sea met. Soon he could make out her masts and her two funnels, and he called to Potter to come out and look.

"That's the lady, I guess?"

Mr. Potter examined the boat through the telescope.

"Yes, that's her all right."

Bob went to his room, and put on a clean suit of white drill. Also he wrote a letter. He and Mr. Potter lunched together in private, and Mr. Potter noticed that Earnshaw was minus his artificial leg and that he was wearing a light canvas shoe.

"About this letter," said Bob; "if the girl keeps her promise I want Mallaby to have it—for certain—about four o'clock."

"I'll take it myself."

"You're a real sport, Jim."

Potter grinned.

"My motives aren't all white wings," he said.

About three o'clock a native boy came scurrying into Potter's hotel, and gave Mr. Potter some piece of news which the hotel-keeper passed on to Earnshaw.

"She's got away."

Earnshaw seized his two sticks.

"I'll be late. Good girl, she has the pluck! You won't forget that letter, Jim?"

"You bet I won't!" said Mr. Potter.

Earnshaw started off on the road to Sandy Hook, pausing now and again to look back, but he saw nothing of Mary, nor did he expect to see anything of her just yet, for he was pretty sure that the girl would not come by the road. Sandy Hook consisted of two broad strips of yellow sand with a shallow lagoon between them, and landwards a grove of old trees gave a pleasant shade. It was a place favoured by Kiawhaka lovers at evening and by moonlight, but at this time of the day it was deserted save by the shadows of its trees.

Bob sat down in the shade and watched the mail-boat steam in and anchor off Kiawhaka. She was painted white, and her hull flashed above the blue water.

"She's the right colour," he reflected.

Presently, he stood up and kept watch, leaning on his two sticks, and just before four o'clock he saw a little white figure moving among the trees.

He hailed her.

"Girl, I'm here!"

She came to him with an air of breathlessness and of tense excitement.

"Bob, I ought not to have come. It's putting you in danger."

"Now, that's just where I like to be," he said, kissing her. "Let's sit down right here and wait."

He put his left arm round her, while with his right hand he unlaced his shoe and drew it off, and peeled the sock off after it. She was puzzled, and he looked at her with shy amusement.

"I wouldn't sell that big toe of mine for a thousand pounds. He's a wonder, that toe."

"He's the only one you have got," she said.

"And like you, girl, he's unique."

At this very moment Mr. Potter was presenting Mary's father with a letter, while Mister Malua still slept in his long chair. Mr. Potter did not remain on the veranda in too close propinquity to Bud Mallaby, but withdrew to the roadway and surveyed life at his leisure.

He saw Mallaby, an inflamed Mallaby, lean across and shake the sleeping Malua.

"Read that!"

Mister Malua, still blinking a little, read Robert Earnshaw's declaration of war.

DEAR BOSS,

I have the honour to inform you that your daughter and I are at Sandy

Hook. She's mine and I'm hers. If that yellow dog, Malua, still thinks he has any claim to make he had better come and interview me just here. I'll wait for him.

Your son-in-law to be,

BOB EARNSHAW.

Malua bristled like an angry cat.

"I go and knock his head off," he said, "and bring Mees Mary home."

He flung away on the adventure, leaving Mallaby to reflect upon the situation and to keep his dignity under the malignant eyes of Mr. Potter.

He sat there for five minutes with an air of thunderous calm, before shouting to one of his native boys to have his pony saddled and brought round.

Mr. Potter strolled away, and he, too, took the direction of Sandy Hook.

Mallaby was half-way to the place when he became aware of a figure approaching him at an unusual pace. He recognized Malua, a very disordered and devastated Malua, bloody, torn, and terrified. His eyes looked like the eyes of a scared cat.

Mallaby pulled up.

"What the blazes——?"

The half-caste stood shivering and snivelling.

"He try to murder me with a stick."

Mallaby looked at him with furious scorn.

"What! Licked by a guy with one leg!"

"I tell you he—one-legged—flying devil!"

"I'll devil him!" cried Mallaby. "You come along and see."

But Mister Malua was not to be persuaded.

"I shut up shop."

Mallaby rode on. When he came to the grove of trees he saw Bob Earnshaw and Mary sitting at the foot of one of them, and Earnshaw's arm was round Mary's waist. He bawled at the girl as he got off his pony.

"Come away from that guy. D'you hear me? He's ripe for hell."

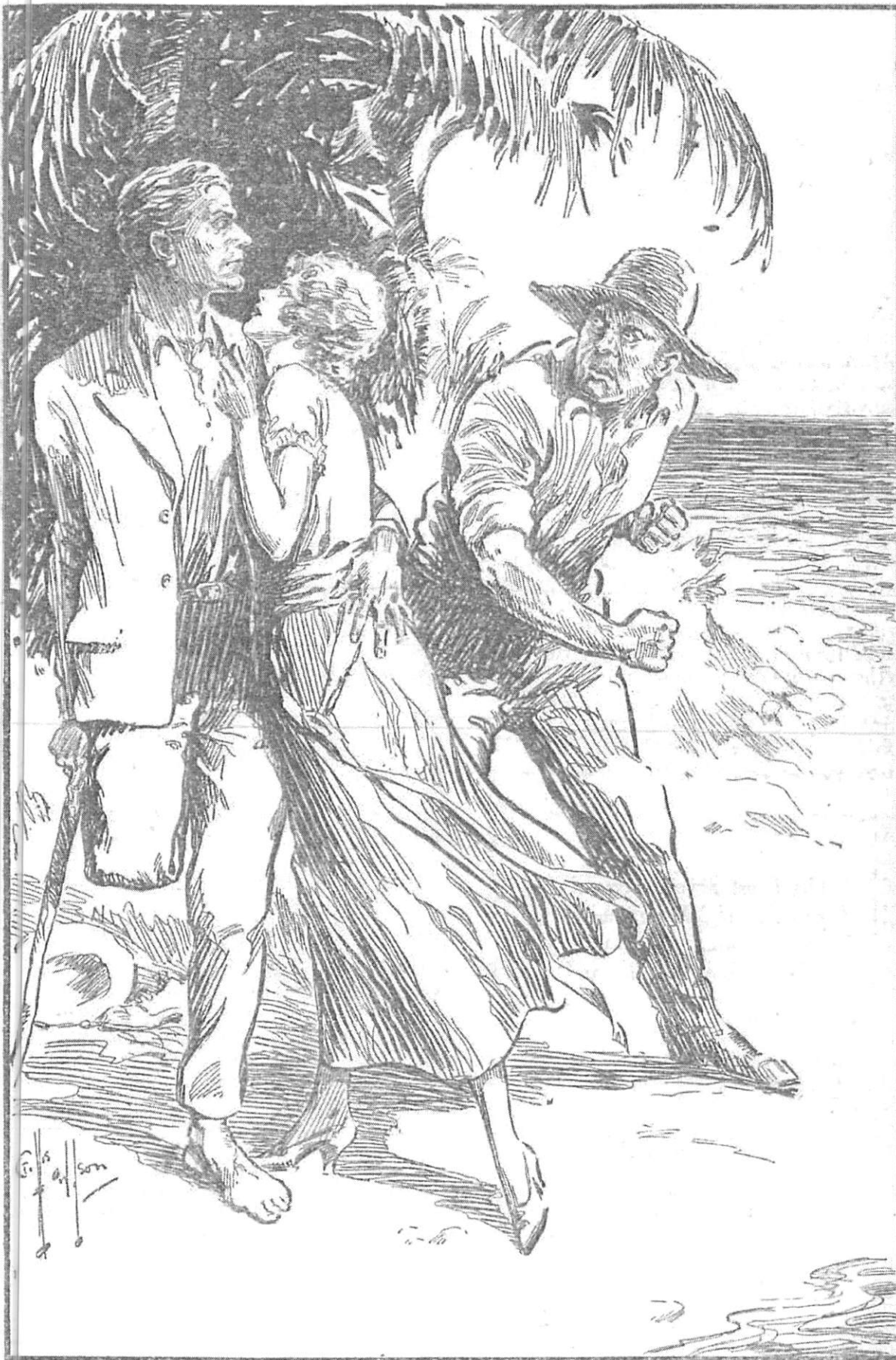
His daughter did not move, partly because she had learnt to believe in her lover, and partly because Earnshaw's arm would not let her go.

Mallaby glared at them, and fastened his pony to a tree.

"The girl's not going to save you," he shouted. "Get up, you one-legged pup!"

Earnshaw smiled at him.

"Boss," he said, "I don't want to hurt the man who is to be my father-in-



"I choose—you—Bob," she said, looking frightened

law. I hold the cards. Why not play the sport?"

Mallaby spat in his direction.

"Get up," he said, "or I'll use my boot on both of you."

Earnshaw was up like a flash, bringing the girl with him. He still held her for a moment, and looking in her face, whispered a question.

"Girl, it's got to be. You've got to choose between me and your father."

"I choose—you—Bob," she said, looking frightened.

He kissed her.

"Run away, girl, in there among the trees. I'll give you a call when this little argument is over."

She did not look. She fled away and knelt, hiding her face in her hands, while those two men fought for her. She had seen her lover, leaping on that one leg of his, thrash the soul out of Mister Malua, and as it had happened to Malua she felt that it would happen to her father. For years he had been the bully of Kiawhaka, but he had made the mistake of despising his man. She could hear his bellowings of rage and of pain, and she thrust her two thumbs into her ears.

Presently she was aware of silence; and then of Bob bending over her, leaning on his two sticks. He had put on his sock and shoe.

"Sorry, girl. I had to do it. I hit him as gently as I could."

She got up and held fast to him.

"Take me away, Bob. He will have you murdered."

"I guess not, Mary. I'll turn that pony of his adrift, and then we will make for the boat."

As they moved away she had a glimpse of her father sitting on the ground, pawing stupidly at his face. She shivered and held close to her lover.

"You have treated him as he has treated so many, Bob. You must be strong."

"I own I'm a bit of a surprise!"

Half-way to Kiawhaka they met Mr. Potter divinely smiling.

"My blessing on you both."

Earnshaw shook hands with him.

"Father is not interfering any more. You might have my bag sent on board the boat, Jim, will you?"

"Sure," said Mr. Potter. "I'll come down and see you off."

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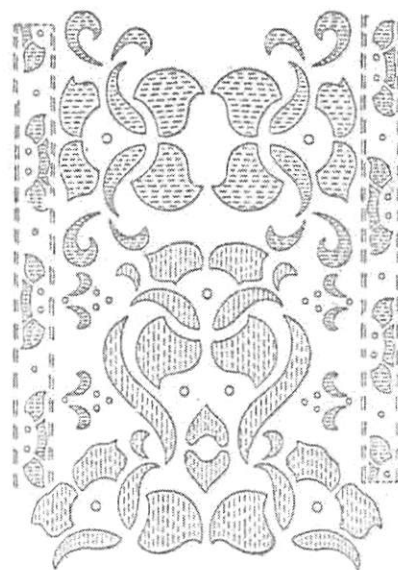
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19

The Golden Bull

By Warwick Deeping

"'Did I not warn you?' she said solemnly. 'I think I came here to warn you.'"

"Our eyes met. I had ceased to be astonished at the wonder of it all. I accepted it as one accepts a dream."



MY workmen had gone, and I sat at the door of my tent while Andrew Chrysoloras cooked my dinner in the wooden hut under the great plane tree.

I was in a happy mood, and inclined to be a little exultant, for this adventure of mine, the laying bare of the dead bones of old Phaos, had progressed triumphantly during the last ten days. My Greeks had worked well. We had cleared the foundations of the great colonnade and opened up the doorway of a stately chamber.

I lit a pipe. My tent was a little white obelisk on the rolling green hillside. I looked down upon the chestnut woods and olive groves, the vineyards, the little orchards, the fields green with beans or young wheat. Deep valleys ran to the intense blue of the sea. I saw Manuel's farm and the castle of the Lascaris grey on its headland between the blue of the sea and the midnight of the pines. Spring had come to the Isles of Greece. Anemones purpled the grass. The cistus, the sage and the rosemary were in flower. The orchards were white with apple blossom or rose-red with peach.

Beauty and peace! I glanced at the excavations, the great trenches, the uncovered bases of the pillars, the grey lines of the foundations. My glance went farther. It reached the boundary trench between my part of Phaos and James Blagden's

portion of the old Minoan Palace. It went farther still, and paused on the white top of Blagden's tent close to the tall cypress.

"I wonder what that beast Blagden is doing?"

That was my thought, and I was startled by it. So I had come to think of him as "that beast Blagden!" And six months ago we had come out together in friendly rivalry and shared out old Phaos between us. Was it my fault that I had been more lucky than he had?

"I suppose he thinks of me as 'that beast Keith,'" I reflected. "Anyhow, I have not seen his sulky face for three days."

I got up and strolled down to the excavations. The sun was setting and the golden light played upon the old stones. I could see the distant castle of the Lascaris and its headland swimming in a kind of rosy haze. The sea was the colour of violets.

I scrambled down into the colonnade and walked along it to the doorway of the great chamber. We had uncovered the scrolled end of a marble bench, and upon one piece of the wall I had found traces of colour. I stood and dreamed. I seemed to slip into that state between waking and sleeping when one beholds strange faces and vaguely remembered scenes. The mood was so strangely pleasant, so much part of the rich glow of the sunset that I surrendered to it, and sitting down on the arm of the marble seat I rested my head against the wall. Why or how the feeling came to me I do not know, but I seemed to become conscious of a presence, a

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memory, some lingering perfume of another life. I felt the ruins, but not as ruins. They were mysteriously rebuilt, repopled. I saw the great chamber as it had been more than three thousand years ago. It was empty, but someone came into it, a dim shape which grew definite, the figure of a woman. She was clad in some purple stuff and her hair was the colour of jet, but the strange part of my half-dream was that I could not distinguish her face. It was like a little circle of white mist, or the moon half hidden by a thin cloud.

A stone fell somewhere. I was wide awake at once. I glanced upwards. Blagden was standing up above on the top of the bank.

The vivid sunlight struck full upon him. He seemed to be bathed in it, to be lit up by it. I saw his long, morose head, his swarthy face narrowing to the sharp chin. He was unshaven. His eyes looked sunk in his head; his lips were drawn back over his teeth. It was not the Blagden whom I had first met a year ago—the rather sullen and strange-tempered scholar; but a new man, and yet as old as time—a figure of mysterious and indefinable menace, with its cruel mouth and its hostile eyes.

I stood up.

"Hallo!" I said. "Having a look round?"

He stared at me, but I felt that his eyes were taking in the outlines of the chamber. They remained fixed upon the marble seat.

"You have struck something here?"

There was envy in his voice, a grudging hatred of me because of the luck that I had had.

"It seems so," I said.

"What do you call it?"

"The Chamber of the Lady."

"Bosh!" he growled. "What evidence have you for calling it that?"

I did not tell him that the words had come into my head during that half-dream which he had broken.

"That's my impression," I said.

"Impression!" And he snarled like a dog. "What does an archaeologist want with impressions?"

His collarless flannel shirt was unbuttoned, and I saw his right hand slip into the opening. The gesture was a strange one. It was as though he had a weapon hidden there.

"One has to have some imagination," I said. "How are you getting on?"

He gave me a suspicious glance.

"I don't talk too much."

And then he grinned with a kind of sly exultation.

"One never knows. I'm getting along. I'll have something to show you some day."

I saw the glare in his eyes, and then suddenly the sunlight seemed to melt away from him. The whole of him darkened. A moment later he turned about and disappeared.

I knew that Blagden had begun to hate me, but I had not realized the ferocity of his hatred until that which was in him provoked the same passion in me. I scrambled up the bank and saw him go to his own ground, leaping the trench which divided my land from his. He showed up against a piece of white wall, and the loose-kneed, long-armed blackness of him made me think of an ape.

"Sulky, jealous devil!" I thought, and found myself uttering the words aloud.

I hated him. I was astonished at the fierceness of the emotion. I loathed the man.

And then I laughed. What children, what savages we two men were! Could any more ridiculous situation be imagined? Two Englishmen, fellow-scholars and archaeologists, coming all the way to Crete to quarrel over a heap of old stones, to sit down apart glaring at each other, grudging each other any kudos that the picks and shovels of our workmen might provide! It was too absurd! The loneliness of the life had got on our nerves. It

was high time that one of us made an effort to end the farce.

I strolled back to my tent, and Andrew Chrysoloras, or "Chrys" as I called him, served my dinner. He was a most excellent foreman and servant, being shrewd, laconic, and not too great a thief. He made the best coffee I had ever tasted.

When the meal was over I sat in the doorway of the tent, looking out over all this spaciousness melting into the soft, blue dusk. I filled my pipe, thought of Chrys's coffee, and the heart in me relented.

"Chrys, run down to Mr. Blagden and ask him to come and have coffee with me."

It struck me that the Greek gave me a questioning yet enigmatic look, but he went without a word.

He was back in less than a minute.

"Well," I asked, "is he coming?"

Chrys shook his head.

"What did he say?"

"It is not a message that I can give to a gentleman."

I glanced up quickly at his dim face.

"What was it? I want the truth."

"He said that you can join the damned, sir."

II

THREE days later we unearthed that beautiful gold cup—the "Phaos cup" as I called it, and with it a woman's golden girdle.

We found them in the Lady's Chamber at the bottom of a great jar that had been sunk in the floor and its mouth covered with a slab of marble. There were other things in the jar—a brooch, Egyptian beads, some fabric that crumbled to dust, a copper mirror, an ivory comb, and a little coil of black hair.

I was greatly excited. I could not help remembering that half-dream of mine, in which my vision seemed to have gone back more than three thousand years. The Lady of the Chamber! All this woman's gear found in the great jar was mysteriously and strangely suggestive.

Chrysoloras was with me. We had got rid of the too curious workmen, and I was sitting in my tent carefully polishing the cup.

"We will have these in the hut, Chrys," I said.

He looked at me meaningly.

"I would take them down to Ombros, sir, and have them locked up in Mr. Gounaki's strong-room."

"Oh, presently!" I said. "I shall sleep in the hut."

I was loath to part with these exquisite relics of the past, even though it would only mean transferring them to my Greek banker's safe. Already they had a queer, personal hold over me. I had the girdle over my knee. Chrysoloras was rummaging in my trunk, and suddenly I was aware of him standing at my side. He had something in his right hand.

"This is always a good friend, sir."

He had my revolver in his hand, and his dark eyes looked gravely into mine.

"You think it necessary?" I asked him, smiling.

He nodded.

"Sleep with it under your pillow."

"You distrust some of the villagers?"

"Perhaps. But there are others."

He was going out of the tent, and I saw his eyes fix themselves on some object and a frown wrinkle his forehead. I followed the direction of his glance, and below me, between the ruins and the road, I saw Blagden's figure. He was dressed in his old yellow flannel shirt and grey trousers. He was standing there looking up towards my tent, and though he was a hundred yards from me I felt the menace of his sombre face.

"He has heard," I said.

"Men gossip," Chrysoloras answered.

It was obvious to me that my men had been talking to Blagden's, and that he knew of my find. I stood up and walked out of the tent. I think

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my motives were somewhat mixed when I shouted to him: "Come up and see our find."

He heard me. He stood a moment, staring, and then turned about and walked away.

I do not think that I was very seriously disturbed either by Chrysoloras's warning or by Blagden's jealous churlishness, but before dusk fell I carried my treasures to the hut and locked them up in a metal cabin trunk I had with me. Chrys had transferred my bed. He himself slept in a little cabin of his own farther down the hillside.

When I had dined and he had cleared away the things I noticed that he seemed loath to go. He lit a cigarette and hung about the doorway. I could see the stars shining over the sea.

"My master will not feel lonely?"

"Not in the least, Chrys."

He nodded and moved away, and I wondered whether his solicitude was not self-inspired. He was a superstitious creature, and I had gathered from some of his gossip that he believed old Phaos to be haunted, and that by uncovering the ruins we had disturbed the spirits of the dead. I more than suspected that he was a little shy of sleeping alone in his cabin down the hill, but I let him go, and bolting the door after him I turned up the lamp and prepared to enjoy myself.

For I was alone now with those rare relics of the past. I unlocked the trunk and laid them out upon the table. I sat and exulted over them, handling them with tender care and admiring their archaic and haunting beauty. I got out a silk handkerchief and lovingly polished the frail gold. This cup—whose lips had touched it? This girdle—whose white body had it encircled? Hers? The Lady of the Chamber; some dark-eyed woman with hair of blue blackness. How had she died? Did she die young? Was she happy, or did these relics carry the faint perfume of a tragedy? I brought

out my sketch book and made drawings of the cup and the girdle, and when at last I looked at my watch I found that it was close on midnight.

It was time for bed. I began to put the treasures away in the trunk, but an almost childish whim persuaded me to leave the cup and the girdle on the table. I liked to feel them there. I drew the table close to my bed, and laid my revolver beside them within reach of my hand. I admit that I examined the catches of the windows, but I had no serious thought of being disturbed. I undressed, put a lighted candle on the table, turned out the lamp and got into bed.

The silence was supreme. The night was still and windless upon this hillside where the dead had slept for untold years. Even Manuel's dog down at the farm, more than half a mile away, was not serenading the stars. I lay and looked at the gold relics on the table. The flame of the candle was steady and straight.

Suddenly I saw it flicker. It swayed and bent to one side just as though someone had passed along the table and caused a slight movement of the air. The flame straightened and grew still, but as I watched it with a feeling of vague wonder I saw the same thing happen a second time.

I sat up and looked round the room.

"Ass!" I said to myself. "It was just a draught from somewhere."

I sat and watched the flame for quite five minutes, but it remained burning steadily and without a tremor.

"Rather a novel idea," I thought, "to be alarmed by the flame of a candle! Go to sleep."

I blew out the light and lay down, and the great silence of the night seemed to settle about me.

The next thing that I remember was being wide awake, and with a feeling of tense and rigid alertness. The room was utterly dark, and I

had no idea how long I had been asleep. I lay and wondered and listened. Then I sat up, and reaching out felt for the gold cup and the girdle. My fingers touched them, and then brushed across the butt of my revolver. I lay down again, willing myself to be reassured, but the queer feeling of tension did not relax.

Five minutes must have passed, and suddenly a little chilly tremor ran down my spine. I heard something, a queer sound as though some big animal were rubbing along the wall of the hut. I fancied that I heard heavy breathing. I lay rigid and very still. Was the thing outside the hut, or in the room with me? What was it?

"A dog," I thought, "a dog from one of the villages."

A moment later I heard another sound, a faint click, and instantly I knew that the thing was human. Someone was trying the door. I lay still and listened, knowing that the bolted door would baulk the prowler. What would he do next? He might try the windows? And that was what he did, for I heard both of them gently shaken, but the latches were down and I knew that they were proof against the blade of a knife.

What next? Was my prowler serious, or was he some sneak-thief who had hoped to find an easy entrance? I made up my mind to wait and see, and not to betray the fact that I was awake and that I had heard him. The initiative was his, but if he worked his way in the surprise counter-blow would be mine.

"It cannot be Chrys," I thought. "Even if the fellow were playing the clever hypocrite he would not have unpacked my revolver."

I did not hear another sound. My visitor, baffled, must have slipped away silently, but I did not go to sleep again until the light of the dawn showed dimly through the drawn curtains. And with it came a feeling of security and of relaxation.

I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing that I remember was Chrysoloras knocking at the door.

"Your hot water, sir."

"Thanks, Chrys."

I swung out of bed and sat on the edge of it for a moment, meditating. I decided that I would not tell the Greek that I had had a visitor during the night, but before I unfastened the door I put the gold cup and girdle into my trunk and locked it.

III

It was a most serene and perfect morning, and I told Chrysoloras that I would breakfast in the open under the old plane tree. My man appeared to have forgotten his uneasy thoughts of the previous night, and as I washed and shaved I could hear him busy and singing to himself like a lover. Once or twice he came into the hut, and I saw that his face was happy and unruffled.

"Shall it be tea or coffee, sir?"

His dark eyes met mine, and I felt that I had no cause to distrust him.

"Tea, Chrys."

He carried out the table, and I followed him into the sunshine of a soft, spring day. It was still early, not yet eight o'clock, and a faint filminess lay like gossamer over the spreading landscape below. All the colours of it were softened, its more rugged outlines made gentle; the early shadows still clung to the eastern sides of the deep valleys.

Northwards Mount Soracte wore a wreath of white cloud. The sea was all turquoise beyond the pine woods on the Lascaris headland.

My workmen began work about eight, and I could see a number of them trudging up the road. Chrys came out with a dish of bacon and walked towards the table where I was sitting under the plane tree, whose green shoots were the colour of emerald.

"I want the men to carry on that new trench," I told him.

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"Yes, sir."

He was bending forward to place the dish upon the table when something startled him. I saw the swift turn of his eyes and head. His hands remained outstretched, and continued to hold the bacon almost under his nose.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He put down the dish, and stood with his hands on his hips, listening.

"Don't you hear it, sir?"

"What?"

"The bell—the bell of the Lascaris."

I too heard it, a faint, deep note that seemed to rise out of the sea, though why Chrysoloras should have been so startled by it I could not conceive.

"Well, what does it mean?" I asked him.

His eyes had a puzzled, far-away look in them.

"It means," he said, "that she is there."

"And who is—she?"

"The Lady Eudocia. We have not seen her for ten years."

I had begun my breakfast, for I was hungry and keen to get to work, but Chrys still stood by the table like a startled and uneasy watchdog.

"It is very strange," he said.

"Do they always ring that bell," I asked him, "when a Lascaris is in residence?"

"She must have come in the night."

I repeated my question, and this time he appeared to hear it.

"Yes, it is an old custom. The bell is rung twice a day, at eight in the morning and at eight at night. She is there, in the castle."

It was obvious that Chrys was troubled by the bell and its message. His sallow face looked sombre.

"Chrys," I said, "what is there so surprising in a lady coming to her own castle?"

He glanced at me sharply.

"Because when she went away it was known that she had sworn never to return."

"Why?"

"Because her brother had died."

"What of?"

I saw the man hesitate. He seemed intensely moved by some memory.

"Of this," he said suddenly, touching the hilt of the knife he carried at his belt. "They never found out who did it. It was as well."

I saw his teeth showing between his tightened lips. "But—you—knew," I said.

"God forbid!" he answered me. "No one knew. It was an act of justice."

I let him alone for a moment, and then I asked him another question.

"Did the Lady Eudocia Lascaris know?"

He shook his head.

"I was a servant at the castle then. It was an ugly tragedy, sir. She went away and the place was shut up. They say that she has travelled much and that she has lived in other lands. It is very strange that she should come back."

"I see nothing very strange in it," I said. "By the way, how old is the Lady Eudocia?"

"She was seventeen when she went away."

"Ten years is a long time. It softens harsh memories. Hallo! the men are waiting for you, Chrys. Get them to work on that trench."

He went, and as he walked away from me I saw that his eyes were turned to the castle of the Lascaris on the headland far below.

The day proved full of interest to me, for the men were carrying on with the excavating of the colonnade beyond the doorway of the Lady's Chamber, and Chrysoloras and I had to watch them carefully as they cleared away the earth and stones.

I had every basket of soil sifted under my own eyes, for one never knew what might be lost if the earth were thrown carelessly away. I think I had forgotten the very existence of Eudocia Lascaris, nor was I troubling my head much about

my prowling visitor of the preceding night. The men were working well, and I had made one or two interesting finds.

It must have been nearly twelve o'clock, and I was sitting on a boulder, smoking my pipe and watching one of the men spreading his basket of soil at my feet, when I became aware of a sudden stillness. I glanced down into the trench. Picks and spades had ceased to work. The men were all standing up and staring at something behind me. One or two of them had pulled off their caps. Chrysoloras had gone to lay the luncheon table, and he must have been in the hut.

I swung round on the boulder. I stood up; I took the pipe out of my mouth. For a woman was standing beside me, a tall woman whose eyes looked as black as her hair. Moreover, her eyes were hostile, angry. She looked at me and at the men and at all the orderly disorder of the hillside, and I felt that she was angered by it.

I took off my sun hat.

"I beg your pardon," I said in Greek. "Can I be of any use?"

I was suddenly aware of her eyes fixed on me with curious intentness. The anger died out of them, and in its place I saw astonishment, something like fear, a memory mysterious and imprisoned trying to emerge.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Keith. I am English. We are uncovering the ruins of old Phaos."

"I am Eudocia Lascaris," she said.

But I had already guessed that.

IV

SHE stood there very straight and tall, and I felt that I had seen her before. But where?

Her voice came sudden and challenging.

"Who gave you the right to do this?"

I must have smiled, for she looked at me half fiercely, half reproachfully.

"You did," I said, "through your agent. It was arranged through the Greek Government."

"I knew nothing of it till I saw a paragraph in a paper. That was in Paris."

"I am sorry," I said. "I thought——"

"It is wrong," she broke in, "utterly wrong. I have come home to stop it. Dead things should be left in peace."

I was astonished, and behind my astonishment gathered a number of motives and impulses. In the first place she had a very peculiar effect on me, so much so that my handling of the situation was prejudiced from the very beginning. The very last thing I desired was the stopping of my exploration of the ruins, but my keenness was countered by a desire to please this woman, or, rather, not to do anything which would hurt her. I was on her side and against myself. It was not her deep, southern beauty which moved me to what might have seemed mere sentimental silliness, but a most strange feeling of oneness with her, some breath of an old tenderness stirring the dust of a dead past.

"This is news to me," I said. "Supposing we go up to my tent and talk?"

I glanced at the workmen, those swarthy, sombre Greeks who watched us as though we were two people speaking the opening words of some strange and passionate play. She understood my glance and all that it suggested.

"It would be better," she said.

Again I was astonished. Her voice was softer, her eyes had lost their hostility. They looked at me with a kind of deep and wondering interrogation; they asked questions; almost they were afraid. Chrysoloras met us half way to the tent. His saluting of her was a thing to be remembered. Hatred and love, homage and revolt seemed mingled

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in it. He would not look her straight in the face, and I could see that the sight of him was repellant to her.

I told him to bring out my deck-chair and set it under the plane tree.

"What is that man doing here?"

"He is my foreman and servant."

She stood looking down towards the sea like some woman in a Greek tragedy, and more and more I felt myself drawn to her by some deep surge of inevitable emotion. It was extraordinary, fiercely disturbing. When Chrysoloras brought the chair I took it from him and sent him to look after the men.

"Sun or shade?" I asked her.

"The sun," she said quickly; "always the sun."

She was afraid of something; there had been a catching of the breath, a clouding of her eyes. We sat down on the hillside, she in the deck-chair, I on a camp stool. I was in my working clothes—brown drill breeches, puttees and light shirt, coatless, collarless, my boots grey with soil. And she was fresh from Paris, gowned in some soft violet-coloured stuff, but very simply. The colour was familiar. Her dress might have been dyed with some Minoan dye!

"Where have we met before?"

I was so startled by her discovering to me the same strange feeling that obsessed my thoughts that I could only blurt out an echo.

"Where have we met before?"

"Yes."

"You—feel that—too?"

She turned and looked at me.

"You felt it?"

"Yes," I said, "directly I saw you. But where? I cannot remember."

"Think."

"Was it—in this life? It may sound absurd to you, but was it—in a dream?"

She sat very still. It was as though she felt herself in the presence of a distracting and mysterious self-revelation.

"Don't," she said, "please. It makes me afraid."

"Forgive me. Then it was—in a dream?"

She made a movement of the head. I began to suspect that she had suffered a strange psychic shock, and that she wished to conceal something which she did not care to confess. I wondered whether our uncovering of old Phaos had anything to do with her memories of ten years ago.

"Would you mind telling me," I said, "why you feel so strongly about our explorations here? Is it that——?"

"I wish them stopped."

"But it is a very serious matter for me."

"I realize that," she said.

"I have an agreement signed by your lawyers. We paid them a considerable sum for the rights."

"The money will be returned," she said quickly, "if only you will agree to stop this work."

I realized her intense seriousness. Whether her prejudice against our work was inspired by anything more deep than a sentimental dislike of interference with this grass-grown hill was what I did not know. I did not wish to surrender to mere prejudice—even to her prejudice. At the same time I guessed that she might have a very considerable hold over the villagers, and that if she chose to exert it she might rob us of our workers. Nor did I know how far the Greek law might go with her.

"I have been working here for five months," I said, "and I was beginning to get valuable results. Would you come to see what I have found?"

"No," she said quickly. "No, I do not wish to see any of it. The past should be left alone."

And then I remembered Blagden, and that Blagden was in the same dilemma as I was. I knew that he would rage, but he would have to be told and be consulted.

"There is another Englishman

here. We shared out the ground between us. Hadn't we better—?"

She looked at me with startled eyes.

"Another man? You are not alone?"

"No. Hadn't I better send for him? He has the same interest here that I have."

She rested her chin on her two hands.

"Yes, send for him," she said suddenly; "let us get it over."

I called Chrys and sent him with a message to Blagden's tent.

"Ask Mr. Blagden to come at once. It is important."

I returned to her. She was still sitting with her elbows on her knees and her chin resting on her hands, and she gave me the impression of a figure set for resistance. She was against the work, against us, against some queer, frightened part of herself. And I was touched by her strained rigidity. There was something here which I did not understand. I knew that women can be extraordinarily obstinate, and that sometimes their prejudices are more deeply rooted than a man's.

"Mr. Blagden is coming," I said.

She moved her head very slightly.

"He is a rather eccentric ruffian. Please do not be surprised if his manners are not what they might be."

A moment later I saw Blagden coming along the road. It seemed to me that his walk was more shambling than usual, more ape-like, and the hatred that had grown up between us became more understandable as I stood and watched him. Eudocia was sitting in the same posture, with her eyes on the sea. I felt that I ought to go down and meet Blagden and warn him, and try to prevent him making a scene. And so I strolled down over the grass, conscious of a wish to protect this woman, to shield her from I knew not what.

Blagden looked sullen.

"What do you want?" he asked.

His tone made me bristle.

"I shall want you to keep your temper," I said. "The Lascaris lady is up here. Apparently she knew nothing about the agreement between us and her agents, and she objects to our turning the hillside upside down."

"Well, let her object. As for my temper, I can look after that."

"She wants us to stop the work. That is why I sent for you."

He smiled. It was an unpleasant smile, cunning and cynical.

"Oh, I see! You thought I should be better at saying no to a woman! Well, I shall be."

He moved on, but I got in his way and stopped him.

"Look here," I said, "whatever you and I may think about it, we have got to remember our manners. She seems strangely upset—"

"What a fool you are," he sneered, grinning in my face. "She has got you—already."

I felt a great desire to knock him down, but instead of that I made myself laugh at his sneer.

"Oh, all right. Have it that way if you like."

"Impressions!" said he, still grinning. "Keith believes in impressions!"

"I do," I retorted, "and some of them are darned unpleasant ones. Well, come along."

We went on up the hillside, and it struck me as strange that Eudocia Lascaris did not look at us. Her head was half averted, and she kept it so until we were within five yards of her. Then suddenly her chin swung round, and she looked full at Blagden as though she were making herself face a meeting which she most mysteriously feared.

"This is Mr. Blagden," I began.

She stared. Then I saw her eyelids quiver. She put up a hand and made a gesture as of brushing something aside. Her face betrayed fear and wonder, but these gave place to an expression of quite extraordinary loathing. And Blagden understood it, for I happened to glance at him, and I saw his lower

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lip thrust out and his eyes blurred and evil, like the eyes of an angry ape.

V

A MOMENT later she had recovered herself, for she was a woman of the world and an aristocrat.

"I am glad to meet Mr. Blagden."

She glanced at me, and I felt that I was being appealed to, and that for some strange reason she was afraid of Blagden. In fact, during all that followed she never once looked at him, while he stood and stared at her in a way that made me angry.

"To put it briefly, Blagden," I began, making a formal introduction of the affair, "Lady Eudocia Lascaris wishes us to stop excavating here."

I glanced at him and gave him the opportunity to say something, but he stood and glared at her, and his only answer was an unpleasant smile.

"I suppose you are interested?"

"Quite so."

He rubbed his unshaven chin.

"I should like to hear the lady's reasons."

She glanced at me.

"It is possible that Mr. Blagden might not understand my reasons."

"Quite so!" said he again, mockingly.

She took up the challenge, and all the while that she was speaking Blagden stared at her, and rubbed his chin and made a face of insolent irony. I had known him to be an awkward beast, but his attitude that morning astonished me. He was as truculent as some old Minoan seaking. His mouth and eyes were mocking and cruel. And all the time that the argument was going on and promising to develop into a bitter quarrel, I felt some strong force pushing me to take sides with her against Blagden, even though my interest was against it. I became involved with her against this other man. I felt that he was her enemy and mine.

"I ask you, as gentlemen," she said at last, "to try and meet my wishes. I know that I am asking you to sacrifice a great deal."

Blagden interrupted her.

"I'm not a gentleman."

He chuckled over the joke.

"Keith is a gentleman. He was at Oxford and all that. I had to black my own boots and find my own ladder. Not being a gentleman, I insist on a woman honouring a bargain."

I saw her flinch, and I broke in:

"But she did not make the bargain."

I saw the gleam of his pipe-blackened teeth and the red in his eye.

"Listen to the impressionist!" he said. "The lady may be telling the truth, but her agents made the bargain, and she has got to stick to it. I have my agreement. You can tear up yours if you are fool enough."

He had pushed me to the impulsive, unexpected answer.

"I shall," I said.

Blagden laughed. Eudocia gave me a surprised, quick lift of the eyes.

"Thank you, Mr. Keith. But if Mr. Blagden insists——"

"I do insist," he said roughly. "Do you think that I am going to sacrifice my work to a woman's whim? I leave that rubbish to the impressionable gentleman."

"I am glad that some men are gentlemen," she retorted, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

Again Blagden laughed, but his laugh was like a snarl.

"Oh, rubbish, woman, rubbish! I asked you for reasons, and you talk a lot of sentimental nonsense to me. That cuts no ice. I am going on working here. Keith can buy a shepherd's pipe and tootle to the young lambs. But I warn you——"

He stretched out a threatening fist, but I caught him by the arm.

"Shut up!" I said fiercely. "There are a good many things you don't understand."

By Warwick Deeping

He twisted away from me, leaving a piece of old flannel shirt in my hand.

"Oh, really!" he snarled. "You ought to be dancing master at a girls' school. Well, good morning. I shall appeal to our ambassador at Athens if anyone makes trouble here."

He tossed his great head at us like a bull, and putting his hands in his pockets, slouched off in the direction of his tent.

Eudocia Lascaris was sitting with her elbows on her knees and her hands laid along her cheeks. The soul of her seemed far away from me, following the path of some old and tragic memory, and I stood and waited.

"It is amazing," she said, "horrible!"

She rose from the chair; she looked towards Blagden's tent.

"Who is he? Have you known him long?"

"A little more than a year. He was born in some northern town in England, I believe. His people were poor and he had to make his own way. It has not made him pleasant, has it?"

She gave me one equivocal little smile.

"No. And you two have quarrelled."

"I realize now that a quarrel was inevitable."

Again I saw fear in her eyes.

"But you must not quarrel. Do you not know that that man is dangerous?"

"I don't think I'm afraid of him."

"Mr. Keith," she said, "if you had seen what I have seen you would come away from this place."

"Because of Blagden?"

"Yes, because of him."

I was astonished, and quite unable to understand her fear of Blagden, for I looked on him as little more than an uncouth and learned boor, a fellow who had been dragged up in a shabby street and who had never forgiven the world for his early shabbiness and his struggles.

"Why are you afraid of him?" I asked her.

She resented that question.

"I am a Lascaris; I am afraid of no one."

But she was afraid, and she knew it; but I was utterly in the dark as to the mystery she seemed to be spinning about us and the ruins of old Phaos. What were her real motives? What did she know that I did not know?

I took my courage in my hands and asked her, and if I had doubted her sincerity or her seriousness, I ceased to doubt it when I saw the look that came into her eyes.

"I cannot tell you," she said.

"You mean that there is nothing to tell?"

"No, no. But you would not believe it if I told you. It would sound too bizarre, too impossible. A month ago I hardly believed it myself, but to-day I do."

"And you won't tell me?"

"Only this," she said, "that that man is dangerous—fatal both to you and to me. I know. I have seen."

I saw Chrysoloras approaching us, anxious about my midday meal and his own, and I came back to material things.

"My servant is here. May I have the pleasure of giving you some lunch?"

She came out of her Cassandra mood, and there was a new emotion for me in her smile.

"Thank you, I will. And perhaps—afterwards—"

"You will let me walk back with you?"

She bowed her head.

"Yes, for you have to tell me what you mean to do."

VI

We went together down the hillside, past Manuel and his lambs and sheep pasturing on the thin grass, and so to the olive groves, the orchards and the vineyards, and the little fields of wheat and of beans. The blue of the sea was cut into

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wedges by the headlands, and beside the path anemones and wild violets were in flower. Bees were at work in the bushes of rosemary and thyme. The intoxication of spring was in the air.

And I—was I not mad, a strange fool walking beside this Greek girl who had the face of a Cassandra? My work abandoned, a promise given because another man had provoked me, the labour of months brought to an end in one short half-hour! Why? Because she had come with eyes of mystery and a mouth uttering strange and enigmatic words. The impressionist! Little wonder that Blagden, the fanatical and grudging hater of other men's good fortune, had sneered at me as a fool.

I was a fool.

The reasoning part of me asserted it forcibly, and yet there was another part of me that applauded this seeming folly. There appeared to be some subconscious sympathy between me and Eudocia Lascaris. It was the subconscious part of me to which she appealed.

Both of us were a little shy of each other, for this sudden sense of an age-old intimacy had set a sort of spell upon us both.

"Is not this beautiful?" she had said, pointing to this Greek landscape. "It is ten years since I saw it. It never changes. Do you remember that it was like this three thousand years ago?"

She had looked half laughingly into my eyes.

"You do not remember?"

I had shaken my head and smiled.

But when we came to the pine woods on the hill that led towards the castle she grew serious. The gloom of the trees seemed to fall upon her. She loitered, looking upwards along the rocky path that was like a river of stone flowing between the dark trunks.

"You do not believe me yet," she said. "To you it must all seem too absurd."

"Things may seem absurd only

because one does not understand them," I answered.

"And yet you promised to stop your work. Why did you do that?"

She paused and stood looking into my eyes.

"To be perfectly honest," I said, "I think it was because I was angry with Blagden."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"Was nothing else involved in it?"

"Ah, that goes deeper. If you ask yourself why I was angry with Blagden——"

Her eyes fell away from mine. She walked slowly on.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"If you have given up the work there is no reason for you to stay here, is there?"

I laughed.

"Really!" I said, "one might almost imagine that you had a genius for getting your own way."

She turned round and faced me.

"If you think that I am making a fool of you—for my own ends——"

"Forgive me, but I don't. But why do you want me to go away?"

"I told you."

"Because of Blagden?"

"Yes."

"Then it comes to this," I said.

"I am to run away because you tell me I ought to be afraid of a sulky, mannerless ass like that. Don't you see that it is quite impossible? Such things are not done."

"Of course. I might have known that," she said simply, moving on again. "But what else was I to tell you but the truth?"

"But what on earth have I to be afraid of?" I asked her. "Blagden can't eat me. He won't ever want to eat me now that I'm not in competition with him?"

And then she said the strangest thing that I had ever heard.

"He killed you some three thousand years ago. He will want to kill you again."

"Oh, come——" I began, and then lapsed into helpless silence, for there seemed nothing to be said in answer to such a fantastic statement; at least, nothing that would not have sounded churlish.

"No, I'm not mad," she said suddenly, with a backward glance over her shoulder. "Let's talk of something else."

For a while we became two matter-of-fact people, and I think she made herself appear wilfully modern and normal in order to counteract the strange impression she felt she must have made on me. She talked wittily and a little cynically about Paris and Athens, and her criticisms of the opera and of the latest plays were just what one might expect to hear from a clever woman of the world. She told me that she was an occultist, and laughed over it, but I divined the seriousness behind her laughter. When we emerged from the pine woods and saw the grey gateway of the castle warming itself in the sunlight, she told me that she would give me tea.

"We are all dust and cobwebs. I took my people by surprise last night."

A leaf of the ancient iron-faced gate was opened to us by an old man. We passed across the courtyard into a dimly lit hall and through a room whose shutters had been opened only that morning. The French tapestry and furniture looked sombre and melancholy. I saw a film of white dust on the top of a Boule table. A French window led us on to a terrace above a wild garden and the sea. The colour and atmosphere here were magnificent, the grey of the walls, the blue of sea and sky, the green of the pine woods beyond. And here tea was brought us by a little old woman whom Eudocia called Anna, and we sat and chatted like a couple of sophisticated worldlings.

But at the back of my mind was romance, mystery, and I divined the same sense of mystery in the depths of her dark eyes.

"Try to realize that I am not quite mad," she said half laughingly as I rose to go.

I knew that she meant very much more than she said.

VII

THAT evening I discharged my workmen, promising them an extra week's pay to make up for the suddenness of the step I had taken. There was some astonishment, some grumbling. I saw them mouch off in a body and join Blagden's men in a noisy pow-wow.

Chrysoloras was getting my dinner. He was rather silent and glum. I think he expected to lose his berth, and he had been making good money.

"I suppose the men are not pleased," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"They understand, sir, the power of the eyes. Besides, Mr. Blagden will take them on. He was always trying to bribe them away from you."

"Oh, was he?" I said tensely, feeling that my Greek was growing a little too personal.

I dined. I took the deck-chair under the plane tree, and Chrys brought my coffee. In a little while, after making his active presence rather obvious, he loitered off towards his cabin. The sunset burst into flame and I sat and meditated in the evening silence on the absurd upheavals of this amazing day. The power of the eyes! A woman's eyes! And the fantastic improbability of it all! The only reasonable conclusion to be drawn was that the woman was making an egregious fool of me.

"I suppose," I said to myself humorously, "that when she has removed me she will turn her powers of persuasion on Blagden."

Yet, all the same, I did not believe it.

The sky flamed red, and I was thinking of Blagden and his un-

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couth temper when I happened to glance in the direction of a rocky hillock which rose northwards of our excavations. Perched on the very top of it, like the Devil looking over Lincoln, I saw the man himself black against the sunset. He was sitting all hunched up, his knees touching his chin, and his long arms wrapped round them, and he made me think of some evil and gloating figure exulting over its prey.

"Yes, my friend," I thought, "I suppose you consider me a most damned fool, and that all the bones of Phaos are yours for the picking. You make quite a pretty vulture."

He looked so sinister up there, so like the enigmatic picture that Eudocia Lascaris had painted of him, that I felt on edge. I began to be aware of a sense of suspicion. He hated me. He coveted my "finds." He had tried to bribe my workmen away from me. And then the thought flashed into my head: "What if it was Blagden prowling round my hut last night?"

A month ago I should have laughed at the suspicion, but I did not laugh at it now. I acted. I waited till darkness came, and then, under cover of it, I removed my bed and the trunk to the tent. I lit a candle in the hut, drew the curtains and closed the door, and sat there for a while to give the impression that I was occupying the hut. About ten o'clock I blew out the candle, and slipped out, locking the door after me. The presumption was that I had gone to bed.

I was on my bed, but not in it. I had placed it so that when I lay on it I had a view through the flap opening of the tent of the hut above. The moon was rising. It lit up the hillside and the hut with sufficient brightness for me to be able to distinguish anyone moving there. I had my revolver ready. If any prowler came to explore the tent before visiting the hut he would get a surprise.

I lay there two hours. And then I saw something—the figure of a

man slouching swiftly up the hillside. At first I was puzzled by the whiteness of the figure. A moment later I realized what that whiteness meant. The man was stark naked.

He passed within twenty yards of the tent, and between me and the moon. I saw his profile, the great round arrogant forehead and the jutting chin. It was Blagden, all hairy about the chest and belly like some primitive man.

He ignored the tent. He went straight to the hut and to one of the windows. He had something in his hand. He stooped and got to work, and as I watched him for a moment I understood the cunning of his nakedness. Had he roused me and had to face a struggle there would have been no clothes for me to grip, and no accusing piece of torn cloth to be left behind in my hand.

"You cunning devil," I thought. "You damned thief! There is something in her fear of you after all."

I levelled my revolver and fired well up over the roof of the hut. He turned, glanced savagely about him, and then went loping towards the ruins. He disappeared.

"That's a pretty broad hint," I thought. "I wonder what you will make of it!"

I had two surprises next morning. I was at breakfast when Isaac, Blagden's foreman, put his head into the hut and grinned obsequiously.

"Mr. Blagden wishes to know, Your Excellency, whether you were disturbed in the night?"

"Yes," I said; "was he?"

"Mr. Blagden fancied he heard a pistol shot, Your Excellency. He was asleep, but the sound woke him. He sent me to inquire."

"Tell Mr. Blagden that I am quite well. I happened to see some thief hanging about my hut, and I fired a shot to scare him."

"Ah," said Isaac, "one of our black sheep, Your Excellency!"

"I expect he was after the gold cup we found. You may tell Mr. Blagden that there is no fear of

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these valuable antiquities being lost as I am having them put away in a safe place to-day."

Isaac saluted me and went back to his master.

"Cool cheek of Blagden," I thought. "I suppose he is a little uncomfortable as to how much I saw."

I was still at breakfast when Chrys brought in a Greek boy who had come up from Castle Lascaris with a letter. I told the boy to wait outside while I read the letter, and this is what it contained:

"I am writing to you in the calmness of the early morning. I have been casting about for something that might convince you that I am neither hysterical nor demented.

"Listen. I have spoken to none of your workmen; I have heard and seen nothing of what you have done.

"This is an arrow shot at a venture.

"Perhaps you have found under the soil a long gallery or colonnade. Out of it opens a chamber—a rather spacious chamber. There are frescoes on the walls. Near the doorway is a marble seat with the arms carved with scrolls. Is it possible that you have uncovered such a chamber? If so, look in the floor for a square of marble. Under it you will find a jar, and in the jar a gold cup and girdle and things that must have belonged to a woman. If my vision is nothing more than an idle dream this room and these relics will never be found.

"As I say, this is an arrow shot at a venture."

I laid the letter on the table.

"By George," I thought, "she has hit the mark! This is the most astonishing thing that has ever come to my notice. What is it? Clairvoyance? Inherited memory? Good Heavens! If it were a case of inherited memory rising out of the subconsciousness it would suggest that she lived in Phaos—that that chamber was hers, those things were hers!"

My hands trembled a little as I fetched my writing pad and wrote a few words to her:

"Your arrow has got home. I shall be with you in an hour. I shall bring something for you to see."

VIII

I FOUND Eudocia Lascaris in the room opening upon the terrace. The shutters were half closed against the glare of the morning sun, and the dust still lay thick on the Boule table. There was something significant about this dust. It suggested the impermanence of her sojourn here.

She rose from a chair by the French window. She smiled at me, a faint, intimate smile, and I knew now that I loved her. It seemed to me that I had loved her since the beginning of all time.

"So my arrow went home?"

I placed the bag that I was carrying on the Boule table.

"To the very centre of things."

We stood and looked at each other as though we saw our mutual fate in each other's eyes.

"I have brought the cup and the girdle," I said. "I found them a few days ago in the jar under the marble slab. But how did you know?"

"Let me see them," she answered, avoiding my question.

I turned to open the bag.

"By the way, our friend Blagden tried to get into my hut last night. He must have been in search of these."

"Did I not warn you?" she said solemnly. "I think I came here to warn you."

Our eyes met. I had ceased to be astonished at the wonder of it all. I accepted it as one accepts a dream.

"Tell me," I said, "would it not be an interesting test for you to make a rough drawing of the cup before I show it to you? I mean—a psychic test. Don't think I am not trusting you."

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She had joined me at the table.

"I will," she said.

And there, using the dusty table as her drawing-board, she traced with one long, slim finger the outline of the cup as one saw it in profile.

"Well?" she asked.

"Absolutely correct," I said.

"Wait. There is something more. I don't know if I can produce it in this dust. The bowl has vine leaves and bunches of grapes."

"It has."

I opened the bag and took out the cup and the girdle. I set them on the table, and as I placed them there I was aware of her emotion. It was as though some deep and amazing memory surged up in her out of the past, a memory of passion and anguish, and tragic happenings and death. She stood very still, but inwardly I felt that she was trembling.

"Please—put them away again."

I obeyed her. And then I stood with my hands resting on the bag, and my eyes on her face.

"Now, what does it all mean?"

Her eyes were hidden from me.

"It is almost as strange to me," she said, "as it must seem to you. How would you explain it?"

"Clairvoyance? An inherited memory?"

She smiled.

"Supposing that memory broke out in a dream, not once but many times? Supposing that I had grown half accustomed to the dream, a dream that was always the same? Would not one say to oneself: 'Well, if it happened in Phaos thousands of years ago, what of it? Phaos lies buried under the soil.' And then——"

"And then?" I echoed.

"I read in a paper that Phaos is being uncovered. I am most strangely disturbed, utterly restless. I dream the same dream, but more vividly. I see the faces of two men more clearly than I had ever seen them before. A sudden impulse drives me. I leave Paris; I rush here. And what do I find?"

She looked me full in the eyes.

"Well?" I said.

"That the faces of the men of my dream are the faces of you and of that other man."

She turned aside. She sat down again in the chair by the window, and I saw the movement of her bosom as she drew her breath. She was possessed, overwhelmed almost, by some very powerful emotion. I did not speak for a moment. I felt that she asked for silence, and I knew that my own heart was beating hard and fast.

And then I stood beside her, and looking down at her beautiful bowed head, asked her that question:

"And you were in that dream?"

"Yes."

"You wore the girdle, and the gold cup was yours?"

"Yes."

"And what was Blagden in that dream?"

"The Golden Bull, the Prince of Phaos."

"And I?"

"You were a fair-haired slave out of the north—a captive."

I did not ask her any more, for I felt her flinch from the intimate and tragic happenings of that dream. I think I divined it all—the love and the horror and the violence. There were some things which she could not tell me.

I turned and looked at the cup and the girdle.

"These are yours," I said. "What do you wish to do with them?"

She glanced swiftly towards the table.

"To forget them."

"To forget everything?" I asked.

She let me see her eyes for a moment.

"No, not quite everything."

I did what that fair-haired slave might have done in the dim past: I bent down and kissed her hand.

"I am glad. Now, what am I to do with these haunted things?"

Her eyes went to the window.

"Let us throw them into the sea," she said.

And that was what we did. She would not touch them, and it was I who carried them down through the garden to the wall above the cliff where the rock face fell to the sea below. I pitched them far out, and we watched them strike the blue water and sink in a little spurt of foam.

"That is one thread broken," she said.

I was watching the place where the cup and the girdle had disappeared.

"It is for me to break the other thread," I said. "I am not a slave in this life."

IX

SHE tried to reason with me, but I would not be persuaded. I hated Blagden now as it is rare for one man to hate another. I felt that he had crushed me and triumphed over me in that other life, and that I was not going to run away from him in this one. The Golden Bull! The slave from the north had come to life again.

Also I had a most strange feeling that Eudocia had to be freed from this dream memory, and that it was I who must set her free. The thing had to be consummated a second time. The old enemies had to fight it out again—the tyrant and the lover. And the strangest part of it all was that I wanted to fight it out; there was a kind of fierce madness in me—the shame of some previous vanquishment at this other man's hands. He had overborne me and possessed the woman. This time I meant to possess her, but not before I had had my revenge.

She reasoned with me, but I would not be reasoned with.

"Then I shall go away," she said.

"I should feel myself convicted of cowardice," I told her, "unless I stayed to see this through."

She looked at me with tragic impatience.

"Why not forget?"

"I cannot forget. Did your

northern man fight—or did he try to run away?"

She did not answer me.

"Then—I shall stay," she said at last; "we will see it through together."

When I returned to Phaos it was with the conviction that the hatred between Blagden and myself was a primeval and fore-destined hatred, and that it would blaze up into sudden violence. The quarrel would end as all quarrels ended before men grew soft and litigious, in a fierce, whole-hearted struggle, man against man. I wanted it; I was ready for it, but I recognized the fact that there should be a ripeness about such a quarrel before one tears the skin from it with one's teeth. We were much of an age; he was a little taller than I was, but looser limbed and narrower in the shoulders. I had always led a hard, out-of-door life, and I was not afraid of this ex-board-school boy with his snarling temper and his clumsy, slouching strength.

"Old Ulysses would have enjoyed this game," I thought; "craft should count."

I found Chrysoloras sitting outside the hut, smoking and looking out of temper. He got up to get lunch ready, after telling me that Blagden had taken on all my workmen.

"He is jumping about like an ape this morning. He thinks that he has found something."

"Oh!" said I casually. "What?"

"I do not know, sir, but he is making as much fuss as a bee in a bottle."

Some time during the afternoon I strolled across to Blagden's ground. He had paid me various undisinterested visits, and I thought that I would return the compliment. I found him in the centre of most strenuous activities, urging on his Greeks like a galley master. As Chrysoloras had said, he was extraordinarily excited, and my trained eye discovered the cause of his excitement. His men had struck

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what was—to judge by the massive range of the foundations—a very important part of the Palace of the Princes of Phaos. They were clearing the approach to what appeared to have been a great gallery, and on the right-hand side I saw one of those huge jars in which the Minoans kept their stores. The throat of another such jar showed in the soil about two yards from the first one, and Isaac and two of the more experienced men were carefully clearing the soil away. On the other side of the gallery I saw what seemed to be a low doorway. The massive stone lintel and the tops of the jambs showed above the rubbish.

Blagden was here. He had been wielding a pick; he had his sleeves rolled well above his elbows, his shirt was open, and he was hot and sweating. I was struck by a curious change in him. His sulkiness had given place to an air of arrogance; his head and shoulders swaggered; he had scented triumph.

He saw me at the top of the bank above, and the look he gave me was one of insolent condescension.

"Hallo," he said, "has Mr. Impressionist come to spy upon us? I thought you had no time now for these things!"

He laughed. He showed his blackened teeth. He was in a vast and princely good humour; he might hate me, but his hatred looked down from a height as at a slave. He despised me. I was a sentimentalist and a fool, the "man with the Oxford voice and no guts," as he had once called me in one of his sulky outbursts.

I smiled down at him.

"You seem happy, Blagden," I said.

He squared his shoulders and held his head haughtily.

"I make good. I do not run after women."

I let his insolence pass.

"What have you got there?" I asked.

"What do you think it is?" he retorted.

"I would not presume to give an opinion."

"I'll tell you. We have found the treasure-house of the Princes of Phaos."

He was dogmatic about it, serenely sure of himself; and, as a matter of fact, he was right, but I did not love him any the better for it.

"Oh, by the way," I said, "about those gold things I found. I have put them away in a safe place."

He gave a slight shrug of his shoulders and ignored the remark, nor was his indifference assumed. I felt that my finds had suddenly become mere petty trifles. He was absorbed in his own glory, inflated by the discovery he had just made, and all other things had become supremely unimportant. He turned his back on me and walked across to watch Isaac and the other two men unearthing the second jar.

I turned away and strolled back to my tent, challenged by this change in the man and by its curious significance. I had known Blagden to be arrogant, but never with such an arrogance as this. It had a different hue and a different temper; it was colossal; it oozed and radiated from him; it gave his slouching clumsiness a sudden loose and large-limbed dignity. It was as though he were reverting to the past, reproducing his Minoan period, becoming again the prince and tyrant, the Lord of the Golden Bull. On the other hand, I remembered the case of Royal, the anthropologist, who had ended his career in a mad-house. I had known him intimately and well, and in the early days of his mental break-up he had shown the same arrogance, an arrogance that had accompanied megalomania.

"Anyhow," I thought, "the fellow has a very swelled head. It has grown like a pumpkin. My inference is that he will not trouble to pay me any more midnight visits. He expects plunder of his own."

I considered my immediate future. It seemed to me that Blagden was

much less inclined to quarrel with me than he had been even a day ago. I was not worth while. Yes, that was his attitude, and it did not please me, for it was the attitude of the prince to the slave.

But there was nothing to prevent me staying on beside the ruins of old Phaos while I waited to hear how this most strange and human re-echoing of the past would stir the passions of the present. Eudocia was at the castle. She had become the figure of glamour in this little world of blue sea and sky, of wild hills, of olive groves and vineyards. I should be near to her. I should see her each day. That was the thing that mattered.

X

I WAS not disturbed that night, save by my own mounting thoughts, and before turning in I wandered about the hillside by the light of the moon and saw all that dim world below flowing towards the silver of the sea. I saw the Lascaris pine woods black and sombre, and beyond them a light burning above the sea, a lamp in the castle which the Venetians had built in the old days of their sea-power.

"She is there," I thought; "I shall see her to-morrow."

I found her in the garden, lying in a hammock which had been slung between two cypress trees, and with a book in her lap. She smiled at me and held out a hand. Already we looked at each other with the mystery of a great passion behind the veil of our understanding.

I bent and kissed her hand.

"Well?" she said. "Well?"

She had expected me; there was a chair placed ready beside the hammock.

"I am still alive, and rather happy."

"Don't mock," she warned me.

"I never felt less like mocking," I said, "with this sea and sky and you."

She looked at me intently.

"Why not be content with it? Why be obstinate and revengeful?"

"You still would like to persuade me to run away?"

"Yes and no. But have you any news?"

I told her of Blagden's fury of work, and of the discovery he had made, and also of the change that I had noticed in him. I thought that her face grew a little more serious.

"He is *tête monte*?"

"Badly so. He has developed a quite princely arrogance. It should be a little ridiculous, and yet, do you know, it isn't ridiculous. In some queer way it seems to suit him."

She lay and brooded over this, and I felt that her inward eyes saw more than mine did.

"It troubles me," she said presently. "Phaos is obsessing him. Again, why not be persuaded to leave him to it?"

"Even you cannot persuade me to that," I said, "because I feel that there is still another thread to be broken."

She sighed and smiled at me.

"Perhaps if you had let yourself be persuaded I should have felt less——"

She hesitated, and I bent towards her as she lay.

"Well?" I asked.

"I cannot finish that sentence."

"May I finish it for you? You would have felt less sure of me as a man."

Three uneventful days followed, and I found it difficult to realize that there was any shadow over this beautiful landscape, this springland of vines, and of olives, and of young corn. Yet, was not the shadow of my own making—a wilful cloud born of the maleness that was in me? The sea lay down yonder, calm and deeply blue, a highway to those other days which she and I were to spend together. Her eyes still said to me: "Come, why tarry? Can you not forget the evil that was in my dream?" But I could not forget it;

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there was a part of me which refused to forget it.

Meanwhile Blagden's fury of work continued. It was a passion, a lust, an orgy; he treated his men like galley slaves, and I wondered how long they would suffer it. Often I could hear him shouting, and cursing and scolding, and see him striding about as though he were brandishing a whip. Time was precious, for the growing season was pressing on, and soon these peasants would scatter to their fields. Some had gone already. I heard from Chrysoloras that they were afraid of Blagden.

For days he never came near. At the sunset hour he would climb the rocky hillock and sit there, gloating over the uncovered bones of Phaos—a Phaos that was his.

One night I made a discovery. I had run out of matches, and I could not find a box anywhere or discover what Chrys had done with our reserve supply. I walked down to his cabin, and called to him. It was about ten o'clock, and the moon was within three days of being full. I got no reply from Chrys's cabin, so I went and tried the door. It was unlocked, and when I opened it the moonlight slanted in and showed me the Greek's empty bed.

"Curse," I said, "I suppose he is down at Manuel's farm!"

I groped about for some matches, but found none, and thinking that the fellow might be coming back at any moment I loitered down towards Manuel's farm. But I saw nothing of Chrysoloras, and his absence made me curious, so much so, that I sat up till midnight, and then walked down again to his cabin. He had not returned, and it occurred to me that he had given up sleeping there.

I tackled him next morning on the subject, and after one rather furtive glance at me he decided to be frank.

"I sleep at the farm, Your Excellency."

"How long have you been doing that?"

"For a week."

"Why?"

He was laying the table, and he paused with a plate in his hand and looked at me strangely.

"I prefer it, Your Excellency. It makes no difference to my work."

"Chrys," I said, "you are afraid of something."

He put the plate down on the table, and picking up a fork that was not as clean as it might have been, began to polish it with the cloth he had over his arm.

"That is true," he admitted.

"Of what are you afraid?"

He glanced out of the doorway, and using the fork as a pointer he indicated the ruins.

"Of all that, Your Excellency."

"Nonsense," I said.

"I am not alone in being afraid."

"But of what?"

"Evil spirits, sir. You have set them free; you have wakened them. None of Mr. Blagden's workmen would come here after dark."

"Now tell me, Chrys, have you seen such a thing as an evil spirit?"

"I have," he said doggedly.

"What was it like?"

"It was a white thing—a naked thing prowling about the ruins."

I did not tell him that his ghost was a solid person, but I asked him another question.

"Is there anything else that you and the other men fear?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"Yes, Your Excellency, there is."

"What or who is it?"

"We fear that man."

"Mr. Blagden?"

"Yes. We believe that he is possessed by a devil."

I said no more to Chrysoloras, but I will not say that I was not impressed by what he had told me. I was. The superstitious fear with which Blagden had inspired these peasants was so much in keeping with Eudocia's dread of him that I was tempted to take Chrysoloras's cowardice far more seriously than I should have done a month ago. I

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did not try to reason with him, for I felt that the thing was beyond reason. It was intuition. Nor did I tell him to come back and sleep in his cabin. If he was going to be frightened he would be better at the farm.

I did not tell Eudocia this piece of news. I spent most of the day with her. In fact it was close on sunset when I climbed the hill past Manuel's farm and saw the two white tents, the huts and the banks of raw soil which marked old Phaos. I saw nothing of Chrysoloras. He must have got the wind up early and left me to a cold dinner; but I did see Blagden perched on that hillock of his—a little, menacing figure, the devil in possession.

He saw me too. He came down off the hillock and swung down the hill to meet me. He swaggered. His head was thrown back as though he were laughing. He looked the colour of olive wood, and I could see the black mat of hair on his chest.

"Hallo, fool!" he shouted.

His attitude was extraordinarily contemptuous and insolent, and I felt my ears growing hot.

"Are you Balaam or his ass?" I asked.

He laughed.

"The Oxford angel is not to be snubbed! But, my lord, what a fool you are."

"Thank you," I said.

"You chaps always get sentimental at the wrong moment. Women! Do you think a woman cares a darn for a man whom she can make a fool of? I'll teach you a thing or two before I have finished."

"I dare say you will," I said.

He glared at me, and I saw the red in his eyes.

"Look here, I have found Phaos—the real Phaos. She is coming up to see it."

"Who is?"

"That Lascaris woman."

"What the devil do you mean?" I asked.

"She is going to come up and see

it. It's her duty to me to see it. She'll come."

"Oh, will she?"

"Yes, my dear fool. I shall go down to-morrow and fetch her."

I edged nearer to him. I thought that the climax had come, and I was yearning to knock him down.

"I should not advise you to go down there," I said.

He tossed his shaggy head at me.

"Why not?"

I prepared to give him some counter-thrusts.

"Well, in the first place she is an aristocrat, and no one can call you that, Blagden. These Greeks have more breed in them."

"Yah!" he snarled. "I'm a democrat."

"Yes. You don't believe in collars or in shaving, and really, you know, you are rather an unwholesome beast to look at."

"You infernal snob!" he said.

I laughed.

"Well, if it is snobbery to dislike a man who doesn't wash himself properly, I am a snob. But I was going to give you the two real reasons why you had better not go down there."

"Right," said he savagely, "get on with it!"

"The first reason is that the lady has a particular loathing for you. Women take these fierce dislikes, Blagden, you know—quite unaccountable dislikes!"

I thought I had him, and my right fist was clenched. I meant to hit him full on the point of his aggressive chin.

"Reason number one," said he. "Let's have the second."

"That's simpler. I shall be spending the day at Castle Lascaris, and if you insist on paying a call I shall have very much pleasure in giving you a gentlemanly thrashing."

He stared at me, licking his lips, and I thought: "Now, I have him! I want him to come at me like a mad bull." But he did nothing of the kind. He gave me a smeary and evil sort of grin; the yellow-streak

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showed in him; he turned about and walked away.

"Well, I'm dashed!" I thought. "The man's a funk. What am I waiting here for? Just for the pleasure of kicking a man who won't fight? Anyhow, let's see what happens to-morrow."

XI

MUCH happened on the morrow, and the happenings began before I set out for Castle Lascaris. I was smoking my after-breakfast pipe when I became aware of a commotion, a sense of stress and of excitement over yonder where Blagden's men were at work. I saw some of them climb out of the excavations and run along the edge of a trench.

Chrysoloras came out of the hut and stood at gaze.

Then we heard Blagden shouting. His voice was a roar; he was cursing someone, scolding in a fury of excitement. More men climbed out of the trench and stood looking down into it as though it held some dangerous and angry animal.

"Go across and see what is happening," I said to Chrys.

He went. I saw him join the group of Greeks who were peering down into the trench. An argument appeared to be going on; there were gesticulations, murmurings, and through it all Blagden's voice continued to shout and to scold.

Presently Chrysoloras came back, and his sallow face looked solemn.

"What is it?"

"He has found a tomb, Your Excellency."

"A tomb! That's rather unlikely."

"That is what he says it is, sir. There is a great stone sarcophagus in a vault. He is very excited. It is still half buried. He wants to open it."

"Why is he scolding everybody?"

"The workmen do not wish to open it, Your Excellency. They are afraid of the dead spirit."

"Oh, that's it!" I said.

I sat and watched, and presently I saw that all the Greeks must have abandoned the trench, for they stood there in a little crowd, noisy and argumentative. Isaac emerged and tried to persuade them to return to work, but they would not be persuaded. And then Blagden himself appeared, furious, waving his arms. He cursed them, he scolded them, and when they remained stubborn he began to abuse Isaac for not being able to control them.

That settled it. I saw Isaac spit on the ground and walk away, and the whole crowd followed him. They trailed off down the hillside, leaving Blagden standing there alone furiously futile. The situation was growing interesting.

He turned and saw me watching him. I could see the snarl on his face. He jumped back into the trench, and his disappearance was followed by the sound of a pick. Blagden was carrying on by himself in his attack upon that Minoan grave.

I had a feeling that a crisis was at hand; that some tragic and dramatic event was maturing. It seemed to me that Blagden was so madly absorbed in his adventure that he would forget to pay that visit of his to Castle Lascaris, but I decided to run down and warn Eudocia. I did not mean to stay longer than an hour. I wanted to hurry back to watch the developments at Phaos.

I found Eudocia in the garden, and when I told her what had happened and that Blagden's workmen had deserted him, I saw that Cassandra look come into her eyes.

"He is there alone?"

"Yes, working like a madman to break open that grave, if it is a grave."

She stretched out her hand to me.

"And you—you wild man—you are chafing to get back! Do men never grow civilized? Must you go?"

(Continued on p. 267)

"Now, if I were afraid to go," I said, "you might have some quarrel with me."

"Yes, I know that you will go, and that I shall have to let you go, even on the night of the full moon."

"What has the full moon to do with it?" I asked, looking at her with a lover's eyes.

"Is that all that you know of the old world and the old mysteries?"

"You believe in them?"

"Perhaps. And you two men will be quite alone? No Chrysoloras and no Isaac! Why not make Chrysoloras stay with you?"

"I don't think that anything would persuade him to stay with me, and if he did his teeth would make such a chattering!"

"Oh, obstinate man!" she said.

I kissed her hands.

"I will tell you something," I said. "I found out yesterday that Blagden is a coward. I gave him his chance, and he would not take it."

"Perhaps he was not ready."

"How do you mean—not ready? If a man swallows an insult surely——"

"Some men are cowards till the devil moves them," she said. "Be careful!"

I went back to old Phaos, and I found Chrysoloras lying on the hillside within twenty yards of the excavations, and looking like a dog ready to bolt if anyone threw a stone. • He held up a hand for silence, and when I joined him he spoke in a whisper:

"Listen!"

We could hear Blagden at work, toiling greatly, and the sound of his pantings mingled with the blows of the pick.

"He is mad, Your Excellency. He has been cursing and shouting in a language which is strange to me."

We listened for a while before going to the hut for the midday meal, and afterwards I sat under the plane tree and smoked, with the muffled sound of Blagden's labours coming to me from the ruins. He

did not break off for a meal or for a rest, but went on working with a sort of demoniac fury. Chrysoloras wandered about like a scared and nervous dog, scenting something dangerous and unholy.

About four o'clock that afternoon the sounds ceased suddenly, but Blagden did not emerge. I told Chrys to go and spy out what was happening, but the Greek would not go near the place, so I took off my boots and set out on a crawl across no man's land. When I got near the trench I could hear Blagden bubbling to himself in a strange and unintelligible language. The sound sent a shiver down my spine, for I could not help thinking that the Greek was right, and that Blagden had gone off his head with the heat or with excitement. Very cautiously I crawled up to the edge of the trench and peeped over, and this is what I saw:

Blagden was sitting on a broken block of stone fondling two objects which lay between his thighs. He was stark naked. His hair was in his eyes, and as he fondled the things he talked nonsense as a woman talks to a baby. One of the things was a skull, the other a golden helmet with bull's horns in gold attached to the crown of it. So absorbed was he that he remained quite unconscious of my presence, and I was able to crawl away without his realizing that he had been watched.

I admit that the sight of him had scared me. Blagden was mad or possessed by a devil.

I did not tell Chrysoloras what I had seen, but I think my grim face must have upset him.

"Your Excellency will not sleep here to-night?" he said. "Manuel has a very good room."

"You can go down to Manuel's," I told him, "but I must stay here."

Sunset came, and as the flush of it touched Mount Soracte and bathed all the lowlands in a glamour of gold and of rose, I saw Blagden emerge. He was wearing the casque

The Golden Bull

and carrying the skull in the hollow of his arm, and in his right hand he held what looked like a long bronze dagger. He made for the hillock, and climbing it stood at the topmost rock and waved his arm at the setting sun.

Chrysoloras, coming from the hut, saw him there, and uttering a hoarse cry made some sign with his hand.

"An evil spirit has entered into him, Your Excellency. See, his body looks all red."

"The flush of the sunset, Chrys."

"Sir, it is not good to be here."

A minute later he had vanished, and I knew that he had fled to Manuel's farm. I was alone with that madman on the hill-top, a figure of strange and barbaric menace, naked, horned like a bull, with a weapon in its hand. I had my revolver in my pocket and a sheath knife at my belt, and I sat and watched Blagden and wondered what he would do next.

He did not tarry long on the hillock. When the red rim of the sun sank below the hills he came leaping down towards the ruins. He disappeared into one of the trenches, and there was silence—silence and the blue dusk.

I lit another pipe. I was feeling strung up and excited. And then I heard a faint sound behind me. I sprang up and faced about with my hand on my pistol. Eudocia Lascaris was standing beside the ghostly whiteness of my tent.

"Good Heavens," I said, "what are you doing here?"

"I had to come," she answered. "Something made me come."

XII

I was greatly disturbed. I tried to persuade her to go back to Castle Lascaris.

"Blagden is mad, or possessed by a devil. He has broken open that tomb, and is running about carrying a skull, and wearing some dead Minoan's gold helmet."

"What kind of helmet?"

"A gold thing with horns to it."

She stood very still.

"He has broken open his own grave," she said. "That helmet was worn by the Princes of Phaos."

She would not be persuaded to leave me, and she was as obstinate over it as I had been in my determination to see this adventure to its end.

"Something is going to happen to-night. I shall stay here with you and keep watch."

I placed the deck chair under the plane tree, and wrapped a blanket round her.

"It may be an all night vigil."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Somewhere among the ruins."

I sat and held her hand, and mostly we were silent, and when we spoke it was in whispers. Darkness had come, and I was tense and on the alert, fearing that he might steal in on us on his naked feet before the moon rose and gave us light. Never had I felt more near to her, more intimately involved with her in both past and present. We were lovers, holding hands in the dark.

Presently the moon rose, huge and tawny, and another mystery was added to the night. Eudocia's face changed from a dim greyness to a pale mask, with the eyes all deep and shadowy.

"Listen!" she said.

Her fingers contracted on mine, for from somewhere rose the howling of a dog, a long, lugubrious wail that when once heard is never forgotten. It was Manuel's dog down at the farm uttering a death howl.

I felt her trembling.

"Someone is going to die!"

We sat and listened to that mournful and eerie howling, and I was aware of danger—a danger that was invisible, yet near, moving on us out of the night. I tried to persuade her to go into the hut and lock the door.

"Be still," she said. "Listen!"

Hardly had she spoken when
(Continued on p. 271)

another sound rose in contrast to the dog's howling. It was more like the roar of a wild beast—deep, vibrant, menacing. It came from the ruins.

I felt the grip of Eudocia's fingers. She shuddered.

"He is coming," she said; "he is coming."

I took the revolver from my pocket and offered it to her.

"Take this!"

She was unwilling to take it, so I placed it in her lap.

"All the chambers are loaded. Shoot if anything should go wrong."

"But you?" she asked.

I drew my knife.

"He will have something like this. Do you think that I would take any advantage of him?"

She uttered a low cry as I sprang up and went forward a few paces.

"David, where are you going?"

I did not answer, for the fighting male was rampant in me, and in the moonlight I had seen a white shape emerge like a ghost from a grave. I knew that the moment had come, that we were being drawn together by an age-old blood lust, and I did not want him to come too near to her. A naked, howling madman was no sight for her eyes.

I had my old soft Burberry hat in one hand, my knife in the other. I was conscious of no fear; in fact,

I was conscious of nothing but a cool and intense desire to kill. I saw Blagden coming towards me, leaping at every other step, and uttering wild cries. He had the bronze dagger in his hand, and on his head was the helmet of the Golden Bull.

A stretch of smooth turf lay between us, and we met in the middle of it, without a challenge, without a word. His dagger was raised; I saw the gleam of his eyes and teeth, and as he leapt at me I threw my hat in his face. It made that downward blow of his fall a little short, but even then the point of the dagger struck me, and only afterwards did I find the mark of the point upon the silver cigarette-case which I carried in my breast pocket. But my own blow got home. I had aimed for the root of his neck, and I had struck with all my force.

He fell against me, but I threw him off, and was ready with a second blow; but he did not need it. He seemed to be choking. He plunged forward on his face, shooting out his hands as he struck the ground. The casque of the Golden Bull rolled at my feet. I had given the ancient tale a different ending.

I left him and went back to the woman.

"It is all over," I said. "You are mine for this life, anyway."

WARWICK DEEPING.



Competition Corner

WE again make an offer of two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the competitors who send in the titles of the four stories they like best in order of merit. The prizes will be awarded to those whose cards most nearly coincide with the votes of the majority of the competitors. Address, "Vote," THE STORY-TELLER, La Belle Sauvage Ludgate Hill, E.C.4, and send in by May 3rd, 1923.

This month we have divided the prize

as three competitors sent in cards exactly alike. We have much pleasure in awarding a prize of One Guinea to each of the following:

MRS. A. EDMONDS, 19, Woodlands Avenue, Wanstead, Essex, E.11.

MRS. MARY DOKE, St. Nicholas, St. Brannocks Park, Ilfracombe, N. Devon.

MISS MARGUERITE STOKES, 46, Fowlers Walk, Ealing, W.5.

Something Doing

by
WARWICK DEEPING

Dec 1928
cassell's

20

SYLVIA MASSINGHAM was thirty-three. She had an income of two thousand pounds a year, a cottage at Esher, a small flat in town, two cars, an expensive piano, a hundred-guinea wireless set. When she wanted a particular book she bought it. She was a very well-read woman; she had been educated at Cheltenham and Girton; she dabbled in metaphysics and metaphysics. She was full of views and theories. She had a nice taste in dress and could afford to cultivate it, and in her tall, dark, drooping way she was a good-looking woman.

She employed a maid named Cookson and a gardener named Hardy.

Cookson had been with Sylvia Massingham for seven years. She was a plain, pleasant, capable young woman who, when she had a good billet, remained in it efficiently but without affectation. She had some affection for Miss Massingham and very little respect for her.

For Sylvia was a strange creature. She looked, and was in a sense, a cultured woman of the world, and yet no creature could be more helpless—coldly and elegantly helpless. A lawyer managed her affairs. She was afraid to drive either of her cars, because she drove like a coward, and knew it. Hardy, the gardener, acted as chauffeur. Cookson managed the cottage. Occasionally Miss Massingham strummed casually on the piano. When the wireless went wrong she had not the faintest idea how to put it right. She had views on gardening borrowed from the books she had read. She would present Hardy with colour schemes for the borders, and she did not know the difference between a hybrid tea and a hybrid perpetual rose, or what you did with bulbs when they had ceased flowering, or how to sow a row of peas.

She was a complete theorist, and more than that.

As Cookson put it—"She's always funk

things. She always does. If you took her down to the seaside to paddle, she'd be afraid to take off her stockings. She's too—nice."

Cookson was right.

Miss Massingham was one of those people who always run away. She could approach life through books and pictures, but never by way of reality. She had run away from lovers, doctors, illness, trouble. She could be generous, and take to flight, leaving a cheque behind her. She was afraid of raw life. She was absurdly squeamish. She would not enter a butcher's shop. She preferred to live on lettuces and fruit, and vegetarian concoctions, and nuts. She shuddered in the presence of red, roast meat.

Life was so coarse—somehow.

She could afford to be squeamish.

"Silly rot I call it," was Cookson's view, "being so nice and superior. But I wouldn't swop places. Now, if she'd been a girl who had to earn her own living, she'd have to get down to beef and darned stockings. She'd be real."

Sylvia Massingham was not real; she would not allow herself to be real; she had eluded and slipped past all the raw, human responsibilities. There were occasions when she annoyed Cookson, and when Cookson wanted to smack her, and when Cookson would say to an imaginary Miss Massingham: "What—you—want is a railway accident. Yes, and I'd like to be there."

Nothing happened in Miss Massingham's life—nothing that mattered.

And then something did happen.

Hardy, driving Miss Massingham back from Midhurst, where she had been visiting a curio shop, had an accident on the Godalming road. It was a greasy, skiddy day, and the smash was one of those catastrophes for which neither party could be held responsible. Miss Massingham's big saloon and one of the

new light cars arrived together at the fork where two roads became one. They were travelling in the same direction. There was misunderstanding, hesitation. Miss Massingham's saloon crashed diagonally into the small car and shouldered it into the ditch.

The saloon was little the worse for the smash, save for a splintered running-board and crumpled wings. It had no glass flying about, for Miss Massingham had taken the precaution to have unsplinterable glass fitted. But Miss Massingham let out a little scream.

"Oh, Hardy—how careless! How—horrible!"

Hardy had pulled the car up and was scrambling out to go to the help of the driver of the smaller vehicle.

"Are you hurt, Miss?"

"No—no—I don't think so. But how horrible—really—how abominable!"

Hardy did not appear interested in her emotion, and Sylvia got out of her car and looked at the other car in the ditch. She was trembling; she was very much upset. Really, such things should not happen. The driver of that silly little car ought to have hooted and have slowed up. The other car should not have been there. And supposing the driver of it was badly hurt? Miss Massingham was very much upset; she was far too much upset to go and investigate or to help; she could not bear the sight of blood. She went and sat down on a new telegraph-pole which was lying in the grass about twenty yards from the spot where the crash had occurred.

Hardy was very busy about the other car. It lay on its side in the ditch, and there was a woman in it. She had been flung into the near-seat, and was lying there with her head resting upon the hood. She had blood on her chin.

Hardy's fresh, good-natured face looked shocked and scared.

"Are you hurt, Miss?"

Somehow she managed to smile at him.

"I'm afraid my left leg's broken. I got it twisted up in the levers when I was thrown over here."

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss. Do you think I can get you out?"

"I think I had better wait."

"I'll go and get help."

He ran along the road past his mistress, who was sitting on the telegraph-pole.

"Is anybody hurt, Hardy?"

"A lady. I'm going to get help."

"I'm so upset; I can't bear to see people——"

Hardy ran on. He had never thought much of his mistress, and he thought less of her now; she was a poor sort of creature, selfish, and perfectly useless. Fortunately Hardy was able to find an A.A. scout, who hurried off on his bicycle to a telephone-box and 'phoned for an ambulance and a doctor. Hardy, looking moist and compassionate, returned to the scene of the accident. Miss Massingham was still seated on the telegraph-pole. As usual, she was shirking the reality.

"Have you got help, Hardy?"

"I have."

He gave Miss Massingham a sulky and contemptuous glance, and hurried on to the other car. The girl in the car had managed to discover a handkerchief and was wiping her face.

"Nobody else hurt, I hope?"

"Nobody, Miss."

"That's good."

"We've telephoned for an ambulance. Wish I could do something, Miss."

"I think we had better wait."

Hardy looked at her compassionately and admiringly. She was a little woman with a pale, plucky face, one of those cheekily attractive faces. She was wearing black. She lay all huddled up there, but she was by no means broken. She was a plucky one. And Hardy found himself wishing that it was Sylvia Massingham who was lying down there with a broken leg and a cut on her chin. It might have done Miss Massingham some good. And there she was still sitting on that telegraph-post, and so afraid of being upset, damn her!

Said Hardy: "I wish we had taken the knock instead of you, Miss. But we'll soon have you out of this."

She made a little grimace.

"Oh, just my luck! I always do have rotten luck—somehow. But I'm not wishing you to share it."

"Some people have all the luck, Miss, and don't deserve it."

"Perhaps. Where's the lady you were driving?"

"Oh! she—" said Hardy with scorn—"she's just sitting on a telegraph-pole, making a fuss with herself. She hasn't the pluck of a rabbit."

Hardy was a vulgar person, but when the doctor and the ambulance arrived and the men set about extracting the little woman and the little car, Hardy proved himself a

very useful person. He was very strong. He got down in the ditch, and while the other men pulled, he heaved the car up the bank, for the doctor had explained that it would be easier to get the little lady out of the car if they could open the near side door.

"I'm afraid my leg's broken, Doctor."

"We shall have to get you out first."

They got her out, but it was not an easy business, and it must have hurt her rather badly, but after one cry of "Oh, my leg!" she was silently stoical. Hardy stood and watched the doctor and the ambulance-driver fitting temporary splints to the broken leg. He had quite forgotten about Miss Massingham, who was still sitting on her telegraph-pole.

The little lady was becoming conversational.

"I don't want to go to a hospital, Doctor. I want to go home."

"Where is your home?"

"Blackhill."

"Got your own doctor there?"

"Yes."

"If you don't mind my saying so, a hospital would be better."

"We have a very good cottage hospital at Blackhill. I suppose it will be some weeks?"

"Afraid so."

"It won't make any difference to me, will it?"—and she smiled. "You see—I live by my legs. I'm a dancing mistress."

The doctor was cautious.

"They ought to be able to make a good job of it. Are you insured?"

"Yes."

Hardy's voice was heard.

"So are we. It wasn't anybody's fault. Just a misunderstanding."

She smiled up at Hardy.

"You have been awfully kind. What about my car?"

"I'll call at one of the Godalming garages, Miss, and get them to fetch it in. If you would give me your address——"

"Miss Brown, Pandora Cottage, Blackhill. Will you write it down?"

Hardy produced a little stumpy pencil and wrote down her name and address on the back of a road map.

When they were preparing to lift Miss Brown and her stretcher into the ambulance Miss Massingham suddenly appeared. She looked self-conscious and a little guilty; she bent over the stretcher.

"I'm so sorry. I hope you will get on all right. I'm afraid I'm no use at all when there is an accident."

Miss Brown looked faintly and ironically amused.

"Your chauffeur has been so kind."

"I'm sure it wasn't our fault."

"We'd better leave that to the insurance people."

The ambulance carried her off, and Hardy prepared to take his mistress home. He and the A.A. scout had examined the saloon and had decided that the car was safe to drive.

"Do be careful, Hardy. Don't go more than ten miles an hour."

"It's only the mudguards and the running-board, Miss."

"I couldn't bear a second accident."

Hardy pulled up outside a garage in Godalming, and without asking Miss Massingham's permission.

"What are you stopping for, Hardy?"

"About the little lady's car, Miss. I promised I would tell someone to fetch it in."

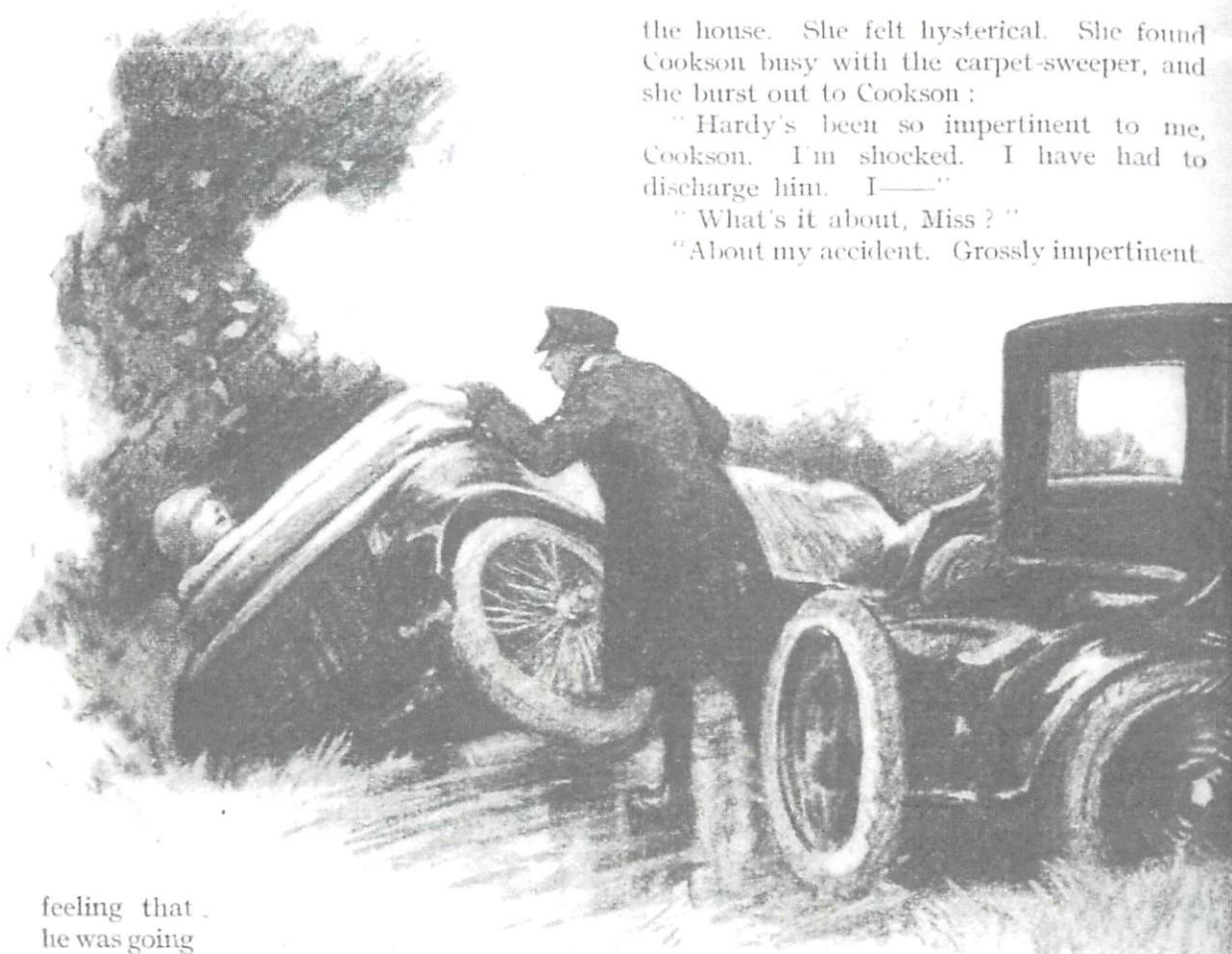
It was Hardy who reminded Miss Massingham to write at once and inform the insurance company of the accident. She did so. Meanwhile, the staff had the accident described to them by Hardy, who did not flatter Miss Massingham's courage or her compassion. The cook and Cookson, the maid, had comments to make, and they agreed with Hardy in thinking that it would have been better had Miss Massingham been presented with the broken leg.

"It wouldn't have mattered to—her," said Cookson, "only I reckon that—I—should have had a time of it."

Meanwhile Miss Massingham was feeling upset and worried. The insurance company had sent down a representative to interview her, and to question Hardy, and this gentleman had advised Miss Massingham against any personal interference. The business was between the insurance company and Miss Brown's company. It was inexpedient to mix sentiment and business.

Miss Massingham assented. As usual, she appeared ready to avoid the real issue and to leave all the responsibility to others. Three days elapsed, and Sylvia Massingham became conscious of a feeling of tension in the house. There was something funny about Cookson and about Cookson's face and manner. Hardy, too, had a curious, sullen, yet expectant air. He was laconic, casual.

Going out into the garden to tell him to bring her in some chrysanthemums, she found Hardy weeding one of the borders. He looked up at her askance. She had a



feeling that
he was going
to say something
unpleasant.

"How's the little lady,
Miss?"

"You mean Miss Brown?"

"Of course."

Miss Massingham looked bothered.

"I haven't heard, Hardy. You see—the insurance people advised me not to write."

Hardy's blue eyes stared.

"Oh, did they, Miss?"

"Yes. Of course, it makes one feel rather horrid."

"It ought to. It ought to make you ashamed."

He stood up. He rubbed his hands on his trousers. He looked very red. He was aware of Miss Massingham's shocked and indignant face. She looked as though she were about to cry. "How dare you say such a thing, Hardy? Disgraceful . . .!"

He stared stubbornly at her quivering chin.

"I've said it and I mean it. If you don't like it—I'll go."

"Yes, you had better go."

And she fled weakly and wrathfully into

the house. She felt hysterical. She found Cookson busy with the carpet-sweeper, and she burst out to Cookson:

"Hardy's been so impertinent to me, Cookson. I'm shocked. I have had to discharge him. I——"

"What's it about, Miss?"

"About my accident. Grossly impertinent.

Of course—I have to be advised by the insurance company."

Cookson looked pert.

"Did Hardy think you ought to have gone to see the lady, Miss?"

"I don't care what Hardy thinks. I'm not to be criticised by my gardener. It's intolerable!"

Said Cookson: "Well, I agree with Hardy, Miss, and I suppose that's impertinent. I'd like to leave here at the end of the week."

These sentimental people! Sylvia Massingham was shocked, but a part of the shock did impel her in the right direction. She went upstairs and lay down on her bed and had palpitation and tried to feel that she was a very ill-used woman, and that her gardener and her maid were very ungrateful people. But were they? Cookson was an admirable maid, and Hardy as decent a fellow as ever handled a spade, and they were leaving her—just because . . . It was

abominable. And she wept. She gave way to emotion, to self-pity, but you cannot always localise emotion, and the futile tears of a selfish woman may become the tears of a more human compassion. Miss Massingham loathed scenes, and she was making a scene with herself, and yet it was a scene that had inward significance. It was as

was true. She felt the better for it. She gave way to it, and felt even better. She sat up and dried her eyes, and then went to her dressing-table and powdered her nose. She was suddenly aware of an altered attitude towards the situation.

She descended the stairs and rang for Cookson. She faced Cookson. She did not



Miss Massingham was far too much upset to go and investigate or to help. She went and sat down on a new telegraph pole about twenty yards from the spot where the crash had occurred.

though she had let fall the nice, delicate vase of her self and smashed it, and the broken pieces had a mysterious poignancy.

"Perhaps I have been rather a pig."

And somehow she knew that the confession

turn her back and look out of the window.

"Cookson, I'm sorry; I was in the wrong."

Cookson's plain face quivered.

"Oh, that's all right, Miss."

"I'm going out to see Hardy."

She went.

"Hardy, I want to apologise. I was wrong; I'd like you to drive me over to Blackhill this afternoon."

Hardy coloured up.

"With pleasure, Miss. I'm sorry I spoke—rough . . ."

"Supposing we forget all about it."

Perhaps Sylvia Massingham did not know it, but she had appeared before her servants as a different person, a more impressive person, as the gentlewoman who could apologise and do it with dignity. For the moment Miss Massingham had become what she should be, and this pilgrimage to Blackhill was revolutionary. The saloon car was receiving repairs, and at two o'clock Hardy appeared at the door with the two-seater, and possibly Miss Massingham appreciated a more spontaneous attentiveness. He was quite fatherly with the rug.

"I don't think I shall want it, Hardy."

"You ought to have it, Miss. It's fresher to-day than you think."

They arrived at Blackhill and inquired for Pandora Cottage. They discovered it to be a little white box of a place with a very red roof and a very green door tucked away in the corner of a new building estate. Everything was very new and rather raw, the road, the garden, the ragged and young privet hedge. Pandora Cottage was gallant and cheeky and just a little pathetic.

Miss Massingham rang, and an old lady opened the door.

"Does Miss Brown live here?"

"Yes."

"I'm Miss Massingham. It was my car. . . . I have come to see how your daughter is."

"She's in bed. I'm her mother."

"I hope she is getting on well? I suppose I couldn't see her?"

The old lady considered the suggestion.

"Perhaps you might."

Miss "Billy" Brown lay in bed in the front ground-floor room with her leg in plaster-of-Paris. She wore a lace cap over her shingled hair; she looked very small and dainty and kissable; she smiled up at Sylvia Massingham.

"Awfully good of you to come."

"I should have been here before."

"Hope you weren't the worse?"

"Oh, no—only worried."

Miss Massingham sat down in a basket-chair beside the bed. Miss Brown's mother

had left them alone together, and Miss Massingham felt rather shy.

"I'm so sorry about your leg."

"Yes, it is a bit of a nuisance. My luck has been simply rotten the last few years. That's why I christened this cottage Pandora."

"I wondered."

"A boxful of trouble. Yes, it is rather a bore about my leg. You see, I had just worked up quite a nice little connection, running around in a small car and giving dancing lessons at schools and to private people. One's leg is one's living."

Miss Massingham both felt and looked sorry. She was attracted to the little, dainty, courageous person in the bed, perhaps because Miss Brown was so opposite.

"But you will be able to dance again."

"Not for two months. And then it may be a toss-up. And people are so awfully casual; they forget you in six months."

"You mean—you will lose your connection?"

"That's it. But still—there it is. I've had a most priceless insurance gentleman down here. Your company seems to be squabbling with my company."

Miss Massingham felt suddenly hot and guilty.

"But that's abominable! I shall have to do something about it."

"Your people say it was my fault."

"My chauffeur says it was nobody's fault, or as much his as yours."

"Your man was awfully decent. Well, I suppose when they have finished squabbling we shall get something out of it. You see, I have to keep my mother. She's rather an old dear."

Miss Massingham reflected.

"Something ought to be done."

"But don't you admit liability to these people. They ought to be sports and halve it."

Miss Massingham thought of going to see her lawyer, and then she thought of something better.

"The thing would be if you could keep your dancing classes together."

"Yes, that would be it. I say, you will stay and have some tea? Do. We'll send out some tea to your nice chauffeur."

Miss Massingham looked surprised and pleased.

"Perhaps I will."

Sylvia Massingham came very much to the conclusion that Wilhelmina and her mother

were both dears. "I'm 'Billy' for short," as the daughter put it, "but I do hope I shan't be an inch shorter in the leg." The tea was a rather picnic affair in Miss Billy Brown's bedroom, but Sylvia enjoyed the free-and-easiness of it, for like many rigid and inarticulate persons, she wanted to be fluid and friendly, but couldn't. But with Billy Brown you found yourself floating on an easy, sociable cushion. Miss Massingham was surprised that people who were so obviously on the edge of things could be cheerful and chatty, while she with her two thousand pounds a year felt timorous and insecure.

"Do come again. Never mind the insurance people."

Sylvia said that she would come again.

On the way home Miss Massingham had an idea, a really active and adventurous idea. There had been previous occasions when she had had ideas, but she had never had the courage to give them life.

"Hardy, the insurance people are saying that it was Miss Brown's fault."

"It wasn't, Miss. It just happened. She was as quick on her brakes as I was. They'll have to pay."

"They might pay up more quickly, Hardy, if we said it was our fault."

"Well, it wasn't quite that, Miss, but I don't mind."

Miss Massingham's idea developed during the next two days. She arrived at Pandora Cottage with a big box of chocolates and half-a-dozen periodicals. And apparently Miss Brown was glad to see her, and not only because of the chocolates, which was surprising and pleasing to Miss Massingham.

She sat down by the bed.

"I've got an idea. I wonder what you'll think of it."

"I love ideas."

"Don't you know somebody who could carry on for you for two months?"

"Like a doctor's *locum tenens*?"

"That's the idea."

Billy did know of someone, a Miss Chloe St. George, but Miss St. George was a somewhat sophisticated and luxurious young person who had a very good billet with Miss De Wint of Bond Street. She would have to be bribed and persuaded that it would be worth her while to become suburban and provincial for two months.

"I couldn't afford to pay her. Besides, the car is still in hospital. How would she get about?"

Said Miss Massingham: "Supposing you write her a letter, and I'll go and see her for you?"

"Will you?"

"Yes."

"But then—there's the car."

"I'll lend you my car and the chauffeur for two months."

Miss Billy's little face crinkled up with emotion.

"Would you? Really? I say—you are a perfect dear!"

And Miss Massingham understood that Billy wanted to kiss and be kissed.

Miss St. George, who was a somewhat gorgeous young person and by no means a fool, shook the perfume of a golden shingle over Billy's letter. She looked critically at Sylvia Massingham, and observed to her that Billy was a sporting little person, and that she—Miss St. George—would like to do the sporting thing, but what about finance? The London dancing season was just about to begin, with all its pickings and perquisites, and Miss St. George, with her Mayfair flavour, was not interested in suburban flappers and school-children.

"But supposing I make it worth your while?"

"A girl's got to live."

"Exactly. And what would be worth your while?"

"Oh, ten guineas a week and a car. I'd expect to be driven back to town at night in time for the shows."

"I'll make myself responsible. I'll provide the car and the money. And when will you start?"

"Next Monday. I ought to see Billy."

"Yes. But you need not tell her that I'm paying."

However, Miss St. George was not a sensitive person, and she was as frankly financial as she was decorative, and she saw no reason for reticence, and so Billy was told how and when the business had been arranged. And happening to be a rather independent little person, she was worried.

She said to Miss Massingham: "It's most awfully decent of you, but think what I shall owe you."

"Nothing."

"Oh yes, I shall. Eight weeks at ten guineas. Eighty guineas. I expect I shall be able to pay up when I get the insurance money."

Miss Massingham looked troubled.

"But you won't owe me anything. I'm the debtor."

"Don't talk nonsense!"

"It's a fact. You have done something to me. You have let in a breath of fresh air. You don't know—perhaps—how I have always funk'd things."

"I'm sure you haven't."

"Oh yes, I have. I was funk'ing badly the day you were hurt. You have taught me a lot, my dear, and somehow—I think I shall go on learning. What I need is a job."

And Miss Massingham's job came to her through and with Billy Brown, for when—as it appeared later—that Billy would not be able to dance again and keep on her feet for eight hours a day, Billy had to face the inevitable and think of adaptations.

"It's rather a knock-out, Sylvia, but I shall have to find something fresh, run a teashop somewhere, or rear chickens. Bit of a problem."

Said Miss Massingham: "Why shouldn't we go into partnership? I have been loafing for years, and I want a job. I can supply the capital."

"My dear, you don't mean it?"

"I do."

And that was how the firm of Massingham & Brown came into being, and its operations proved to be both unexpected and original. It did not open a hat-shop, or breed chickens, or make a beautiful and unsuccessful mess of market-gardening. It knew very little to begin with, but it learnt much. It lost money and grew wiser. It bought an estate, and built bungalows, and turned the old house on the estate into a kind of hostel for overworked young women who needed rest and a cheap holiday. It enjoyed itself immensely, and loved its job and each other, and confounded its male critics by somehow not going bankrupt.

It founded a little community and called it a little wilfully, "Why Not Park."

Hardy was the estate gardener; Cookson became the stewardess of the hostel. They knew that Miss Billy had brains, and they were also agreed that Miss Massingham had turned out to be what Hardy called "A bit of a surprise packet."

And Billy was always saying: "My dear, isn't it just perfect having a job of one's own? And we've done it all by ourselves."



THE MENDER

*HE goes his way, his work is never done,
For things are broken daily, maimed and rent;
In mending these his busy days are spent;
He does not cease his toil with set of sun,
Not any task, however irksome, shun.
He covers ugliness, and brings content
To fretful souls. His wisdom subtly blent
With sympathy is shared with everyone*

*He binds up broken hearts whose anguish seemed
Too great for speech; their griefs he can allay.
He strengthens shattered faiths lest they should fail,
Building anew ideals most esteemed.
Till bitterness and sorrow fade away,
For Time, the mender, lays his hand on all.*

LESLIE MARY OYLER

Two Old Men

By Warwick Deeping

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"Doyle!"

His voice was sharp, and Doyle swung round. His coat was open, and showing the white V of his shirt.

"Hallo!"

"What do you mean by lying to me?"

They glared at each other. Pharazyn had his chin thrust out.

"Either it's your rotten vanity, or some rotten game—"



R. PHARAZYN sat down on a green seat under the shade of a palm tree. The orchestra of the Hotel Bristol was playing on the terrace of the hotel gardens. The sun shone; the sea was watered silk, and of a blueness that suggested lapis lazuli.

Mr. Pharazyn tapped with his stick in time with the music. This was his third day at

Beaulieu; he felt the southern sun warming his waistcoat, and he realised that life was good. As yet he knew nobody in Beaulieu, and he wanted to know somebody, for Mr. Pharazyn was sixty and sociable, though his sociability had its reservations. Beaulieu was full of other sixtyish people, many of whom inevitably would be bores.

Mr. Pharazyn was an expert in the detecting and avoiding of bores. Soldiers and sailors were always suspect, though sailors had the virtue of easy discovery. They were fog-horns; they carried their own warning about with them. When Mr. Pharazyn heard the particular voice that he associated with a rear-admiral he cut his cable and put to sea.

Soldiers were a little less obvious, but if you heard a fellow talking about any place that sounded like Oodepetam or Jugglewaallah, he was to be avoided. He would begin to tell you about the horse he rode in the Putaput Mounted Rifles forty years ago, and all about the members of the mess, and what they said and what they drank and smoked and shot, and what old Sir Pumfrey Hignett said about the

colonel's wife, though—in all probability—it would have been much more interesting to know what the colonel's wife said about Sir Pumfrey.

For Mr. Pharazyn was a jocund person with a white head and a good colour; a comfortable man because he felt at ease with himself. He liked looking at gardens and watching young things playing tennis, and women hating each other's frocks, and good dancing and good skating. He had ceased to be worried by the personal pomp of life. He was not fretted and challenged by youth.

But on a morning like this, with the sun on his waistcoat, he was ready to talk. And he thought: "Rather liked the look of that woman at the table on my left. Yes, distinctly so. Got a sense of humour, and she's not too young."

For youth was all very well, nicer to watch, perhaps, than to play with. It assumed everything or nothing, and to Mr. Pharazyn there was neither everything nor nothing. The world was "you," as you happened to see it or chose to see it. There were all sorts of interesting theories and very few good cooks.

"Surely—I know that fellow."

He had become aware of a man and two girls who had paused to listen to the music. They were in tennis kit; they had been playing on the Bristol courts, and Pharazyn stared at the man. Surely it was Doyle, Douglas Doyle, who had been at Harrow and Trinity with him? He had not seen Doyle for twenty years. And this was Doyle and yet not Doyle, or rather—it was Doyle as he had been and not as he should be; decently and sagely sixtyish. The fellow had buttered yellow hair and a pink face. He wore

Two Old Men

a white blanket coat and carried two rackets. At a distance of fifteen yards he looked young, too conscientiously young.

Pharazyn was staring rather hard at the supposed Doyle, and the other man became aware of the scrutiny. He turned his head and glanced at the elderly person on the green seat. His glance expressed annoyance, and if there was any recognition in the glance it was instantly suppressed. The orchestra ceased playing, and the hypothetical Doyle and the two girls moved on, passing in front of Pharazyn's seat.

The man in the white blanket-coat ignored Mr. Pharazyn, and yet Pharazyn had a feeling that the other fellow knew he was there. Doyle was talking to his partners.

"Going in to the Bristol to-night?"

"Rather so."

"Same here."

Mr. Pharazyn got up. "It's Doyle all right. But hang it all, why did he cut me?" He was interested, and he had nothing to do, and he followed Doyle and the two young women and saw them enter the gateway of the Oxford Hotel.

"Of course," thought Pharazyn, "daughters, probably. Just about the right age. Funny way he looked at me, as though he owed me money and wasn't pleased to see me. But he did see me. The fellow has worn well, darned well. But his hair used to be a bit darker. Oh, well, we all have our little weaknesses."

Pharazyn went back to lunch at the Hotel Bristol. Sixtyish he might be, but he did not feel it; you could not help your age, but you could help worrying about it and fussing yourself in the attempt to look ten years younger than you were. Why not be comfortable? Why dye your hair and have your face massaged? For to Pharazyn there was something repulsive in the hectic heat of the restless old dog who had not learnt to lie down in the sun.

In the dining-room he found that pleasant person with a powdering of grey in her dark hair, lunching alone

at the table on his left. She had a bright colour that was natural, jocund brown eyes, good teeth. The texture of her was wholesome and well cared for. She did not suggest too much artifice, but she had taken trouble with her skin. Mr. Pharazyn disliked the downright sort of woman who left her complexion to the care of nature, and her stockings to providence. But the woman at the next table made Mr. Pharazyn think of pleasant, high-grade fruit that had come to ripeness. She interested him.

"Early fifties, I should say. Doesn't worry. Has a sense of humour."

And then a hurrying waiter, squeezing past a *confrère*, upset the bottle of Volnay on the lady's table. At the Hotel Bristol such a catastrophe was as unusual as the dropping of a rifle by a Guardsman on parade.

Mr. Pharazyn quickly proffered a serviette.

"No damage, I hope?"

"Only the tablecloth and my fish. Sauce à la Volnay!"

She smiled. She said something pleasant and reassuring to the apologetic and worried waiter. The head waiter and another waiter had glided up. They had shocked faces. She smiled them off. She said that it was her fault; she had placed the bottle too near the edge of the table.

In the spirit Mr. Pharazyn took off his hat to her. Her good temper was as consoling as her face.

The spilt wine had given Mr. Pharazyn his opportunity. He said: "You were very merciful to the waiter."

She smiled at him.

"If one can afford to stay here, one ought to be able to afford to be merciful, don't you think?"

"I do."

"If one had made oneself unpleasant the poor man might have been sacked."

"Probably."

"And—probably—being an Italian, he has a wife and five children. And I'm here for my pleasure."

Mr. Pharazyn had to make her a little bow. What a comfortable and comforting woman!

By Warwick Deeping

"My compliments to your philosophy. Yes, a philosophy is essential. Making things unpleasant for poor devils should be like sour wine, bound to disagree with us."

"It does."

"Oh, but some people have very insensitive stomachs."

Pharazyn was rather fond of a little siesta after lunch, but in the lounge he saw the lady drinking her coffee and smoking a cigarette; also, there was an empty chair beside her, and Pharazyn went towards that chair.

"Mind if I take this?"

She welcomed him. She was amused.

"It's not reserved."

"Thank you. I'm always rather cautious in these places," he replied.

"Oh! How?"

"Bores."

"But are you quite sure——?" she began.

"I think so. I have had a good deal of experience. And then, of course, one has to remember that one may be a bore—oneself."

"Does that worry you?" she asked.

"Not often."

"Then I think you might assume——"

"At this moment I am presuming. May I?"

"Yes, I think so."

They talked.

For some unexplained reason their conversation drifted to people and things which neither of them liked, and they found themselves in sympathetic agreement. Mr. Pharazyn disliked women who would keep small dogs and encouraged them to yap, and were perfect fools about "Dear Too-too," and brutal to servants and waiters. He disliked people who had bad colds and would travel with them in trains, and had what he called Third-Class sneezes and sniffs.

"People, dear lady, who smell of eucalyptus, and seem to take a delight in broadcasting their sneezes."

She laughed.

"Mostly men, I think."

"Too true."

"So the man with the common cold

balances the lady with the yapping dog."

"I agree. Then there is the sort of man who will stand in the middle of the tube escalator and crawl up the middle of the passage."

"And the dear people who must say good-bye and have a last gossip in the theatre doorway when everybody is trying to get out."

"And the dear ladies who walk blindly down the pavement looking into shop windows."

"And men who smoke cigars in closed cars."

Again they laughed.

"Why this querulousness? We lunched very well."

"Surely that's the reason. A comfortable grumble after a comfortable meal, in a comfortable chair, and with a sympathetic listener."

"And what do you do when you are really uncomfortable?"

Mr. Pharazyn looked mischievous.

"Oh, I turn up my collar and shiver."

Mr. Pharazyn amused her. He was Peter Pan with a white head, always refusing to be shop-soiled and responsible, and always a little unexpected, and women adore the unexpected. And yet he was comfortably and pleasantly surprising. His pirates and Red Indians would be well washed, and never obvious and out of hand. If he did the unexpected he would do it gallantly and *de luxe*. She told him her name was Mrs. Richmond.

And then it occurred to Mr. Pharazyn to tell her about Doyle.

"Curious coincidence—this morning. Saw a man I used to know years ago."

"One does on occasions. Was that all the coincidence?"

He liked her quickness.

"No. He cut me."

"Was—that—a coincidence?"

"Well—really! That's the point. I admit that I was a little intrigued. He had been playing tennis, and he had two girls with him. They had stopped to listen to the orchestra."

"And where were you?"

"On a seat in the sun. Now, presumably the girls were his daughters."

Two Old Men

"Why—presumably? Not in these days, surely."

"Well, you see, he is my age, sixtyish."

"Was it very long ago?"

"Thirty years or so."

"He had forgotten you."

"No, I don't think he had. Besides, his memory should be as good as mine. We were at Harrow and Trinity together. We rowed in the same boat."

"And he cut you."

"He refused to recognise me."

"And what did you do?"

"I got up and followed him, and saw where he and the girls went. They are staying at the 'Oxford.'"

Mrs. Richmond was interested.

"Perhaps I know him. What is he like?"

"Tall and thin and pink. Looks forty, very much forty. He has a head like melted butter."

"I think I do know him."

"His name is Doyle. By the way—I heard him say that he is coming in here to-night."

Now, Mr. Pharazyn did not know that Mrs. Richmond had a daughter staying in the hotel, for Miss Eileen Richmond had been in bed for a week with 'flu, but was expected downstairs in a day or two, so that Pharazyn failed at first to appreciate the piquancy of a situation that was about to develop. He thought Mrs. Richmond a very charming person, which she was. He reflected that his holiday had begun very pleasantly, and that sunlight and sympathy are admirable phenomena.

Every night at the Hotel Bristol one danced. People came in from the other hotels. Mr. Pharazyn still danced, but only upon occasions. He was too old for a gay life. He was looking forward to seeing Mrs. Richmond again in the lounge after dinner; she appeared very late at dinner; she was at the soup stage when Pharazyn was eating *Pêche Melba*.

He said: "I am looking forward to seeing Mr. Doyle here to-night."

She gave him an enigmatic glance.

"Supposing he cuts you again?"

"Well, I think I shall cut in. I fail to see why I should be disowned."

"You can't explain it?"

"Well, I do consider myself knowable."

"Undoubtedly."

What a nice, delicate, ironic, playful touch she had! Mr. Pharazyn left her to finish her dinner, and went into the lounge and ordered coffee and a liqueur. He appropriated two chairs. He was hoping that Mrs. Richmond would arrive and occupy the other chair. Meanwhile, he lit a cigar.

Suddenly he discovered Doyle wandering about the lounge as though he were looking for someone. His hair was sleek and glistening; he looked very pink; his dinner-jacket had a pronounced waist. Quite the young man-about-town. Pharazyn observed him, and wondered, and began to feel prejudiced against Doyle, and not only because Doyle had refused or had failed to remember him. The fellow was a fake. Undoubtedly his hair was dyed, and probably he wore corsets. He was altogether too damned young.

Doyle did not see Pharazyn, and presently strolled off towards the ballroom, where the orchestra had begun to play, but Pharazyn remained in his chair waiting, and hoping for Mrs. Richmond. He was more than halfway through his half-crown cigar. Mrs. Richmond seemed to be dining very much at her leisure.

Since the lady did not appear, Pharazyn went to explore. He drifted in the direction of the music, and arriving at the doorway of the ballroom, ran his eyes over the people seated at the tables round the dancing-floor. He saw Doyle's yellow head shining like a gilded dome in a city of multi-coloured roofs. He was sitting at a table on the right, and halfway down the room, and his back was towards Pharazyn. Also he was sitting at the same table as Mrs. Richmond, and he was being politely gay.

Pharazyn felt surprised and annoyed.

"Damn it," he thought; "she

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might have told me! Supposing I have put my foot right in it up to the ankle?"

Yes, he was very much annoyed. Had he committed a solecism? And, anyway, he wasn't pleased to see Doyle sitting at that table and making himself pleasant. Damn Doyle! And Mr. Pharazyn's annoyance developed a puckish humour. He felt that he wanted to intervene and take a hand in the game; dare Doyle to cut him a second time.

Meanwhile the orchestra began to play a fast fox-trot, and Pharazyn saw Doyle stand up. Apparently he was trying to persuade Mrs. Richmond to dance, but Mrs. Richmond would not be persuaded. Doyle resumed his seat, and Mrs. Richmond, having discovered Pharazyn standing in the doorway, smiled and made a movement of the head. It was an invitation to Pharazyn to join them; her smile was conspiratorial and mischievous.

"No, I'm dashed if I will!" thought Mr. Pharazyn, but nevertheless he went edging his way between the dancers and the tables, and arriving behind Doyle's chair. Doyle did not know that he was there, but sat talking neatly and confidently to Mrs. Richmond, while Pharazyn observed Doyle's head and the back of his neck.

Mrs. Richmond became suddenly animated. Her eyes suggested to Mr. Pharazyn that they shared an amusing situation.

"Oh, do come and join us! Here's a chair. Mr. Doyle, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Pharazyn."

Doyle's glistening head gave a kind of jerk. He turned in his chair, but did not rise.

Pharazyn smiled down at him.

"Hallo, Doyle! Ages since we met. You remember me?"

"Really, I'm afraid I don't," replied Doyle, after some hesitation.

"You remember our bumping 'Jesus' in the Long Reach?"

"No—I can't say that I do. Perhaps you are mixing me up with my brother."

"Have you a brother?"

"Much older than I am. Probably it was Jimmy."

"Ah, was it?" said Pharazyn, laconically, noticing the same little brown mole over Doyle's left eyebrow.

Pharazyn collected a chair and sat down. He met Mrs. Richmond's brown eyes veiled with innocence, yet concealing amusement. These two old men between them had created a delightful situation, but one of them appeared to find it disconcerting and uncomfortable. Doyle was lighting a cigarette, and somehow he seemed to look less young.

"When were you up, Pharazyn?"

"Oh—somewhere in the eighties."

"Time does slip by. So you and Jimmy were in the same boat."

Pharazyn's heart began to harden. If the fellow chose to attempt an absurd and unnecessary piece of bluff, well—he would make it as uncomfortable as possible for him.

"No, Douglas rowed with me. Jimmy Doyle got his Blue about seven years before I went up. I happen to remember."

Said Doyle, with a little quirking smile: "I think you have got your dates rather mixed. But it doesn't matter."

But it did matter, and Mr. Pharazyn became more and more determined not to be relegated to senility by a man who for some reason or other was lying, and lying very foolishly. What was Doyle's game? Was it just cross, silly vanity, or had he a *tendresse* for Mrs. Richmond?

Mrs. Richmond intervened, for Mr. Pharazyn's eyes were looking combative.

"I hope Eileen will be down to-morrow. Eileen, you know, Mr. Pharazyn, is my daughter. She has been laid up with 'flu.'"

"Ah," said Pharazyn, "of course."

"And Mr. Doyle has been so kind. There are so few dancing men down here, and Eileen is dancing mad, and Mr. Doyle has danced with her—so generously. I'm afraid he must have been terribly bored."

Doyle fidgeted irritably.

Two Old Men

"Not a bit. Our styles mix—marvellously."

"How nice of you to say so! I always think that when a man is past fifty he ought to be allowed to be lazy. Don't you agree, Mr. Pharazyn?"

"Absolutely. Don't you find yourself a little stiff in the joints, Doyle?"

Doyle gave him a savage little smile.

"No, I don't, not in the least."

But a moment later he had discovered some acquaintances at the end of the room, and he had to go across and speak to them. "Excuse me, there's Potter and his crowd," and he stayed with the Potter crowd and danced with two of the women. He danced exceedingly well, but he looked unhappy.

Said Mrs. Richmond: "Poor old thing, you have burst his bubble for him. I call it rather pathetic."

Pharazyn was still feeling combative.

"Pathetic! Why, the fellow's a fake and a liar! Posing as forty!"

"He does it rather well."

"Does he? But—the ass! Why didn't he face the situation? Nothing to be ashamed of if one looks forty and confesses to sixty!"

"My dear man, he is one of those unfortunate moderns who simply cannot grow old. He lives in terror of growing old."

Pharazyn grinned.

"And then I appeared like a death's head! All I can say is, I don't feel like one."

"You don't look like one."

"Thank you."

But Pharazyn did not see the pathos in Doyle as Mrs. Richmond saw it, even though she had begun to realize that Doyle was behaving rather foolishly with her daughter and would have to be discouraged. The discouragement had dropped with Mr. Pharazyn from heaven. And Pharazyn meant to have it out with Doyle. He waited for him in the lounge, and followed Doyle out into the warm, southern night. A palm in the hotel gardens spread itself against the stars, but Pharazyn was more interested in life's exactitudes than in the stars.

"Doyle!"

His voice was sharp, and Doyle swung round. His coat was open, and showing the white V of his shirt.

"Hallo!"

"What do you mean by lying to me?"

They glared at each other. Pharazyn had his chin thrust out.

"Either it's your rotten vanity, or some rotten game——"

Doyle's face was pinched and vicious.

"I have an objection to being dated by a fellow who has let himself go to seed. You're fat, Pharazyn, and ancient. I've kept myself fit. I'm twenty years younger than you are."

"Oh, are you! Anyway, I don't dye my hair."

"You cad!"

"You little old lounge lizard!"

And there their rather unseemly squabble ended. Doyle made a queer little noise like a man struck by a bullet, turned, and wilted away into the darkness, and suddenly Pharazyn felt sorry, and thought for the moment of going after him. A vulgar squabble! Two old men ought to have known better. And Mr. Pharazyn rediscovered the stars, and stood and looked at them before returning to the hotel.

He went up to his room. He was conscious of feeling old. Almost he understood Doyle's pathetic artifices, his clutching at youth.

He thought—"I'll go round to-morrow and apologise. I ought not to have lost my temper."

But next day when he called at the Hotel Oxford and inquired for Mr. Doyle, the clerk at the inquiry office told him that Mr. Doyle had left suddenly by an early train.

Pharazyn felt a little sorry and a little contemptuous. So Doyle had run away from the ghost of old age to find some other corner where he could play the man of forty. But what foolishness! Was there a place anywhere on earth to which the ghost of your sixtyish self did not follow you?

Pharazyn found Mrs. Richmond in the Bristol Gardens. Again the sun was shining and the orchestra playing "Tales of Hoffman"; even the blue

By Warwick Deeping

sea looked sentimental, and the sunlight upon it reminded Pharazyn of Doyle's polished head.

He raised his hat, and stood looking down at this woman of pleasant maturity.

"Good morning. I've just been round to apologise to our friend. We had a little breeze last night."

"How nice of you! And did you?"

Pharazyn became flippant, perhaps because he was not feeling flippant.

"No. Doyle has gone off to Patagonia in a hurry. Probably he won't be dated there."

"He has run away?"

"Yes."

She looked at the sea.

"Poor old thing. If he could have played at being forty without being silly it would not have mattered. But he really was becoming very silly. You saved me the trouble of intervening."

Mr. Pharazyn sat down.

"How's your daughter?"

"Oh, much better. She is coming down for tea. We shall have to find her another dancing partner."

"Someone who is not silly?"

"Yes. Or who has a right to be silly."

Pharazyn smiled.

"We poor men!"

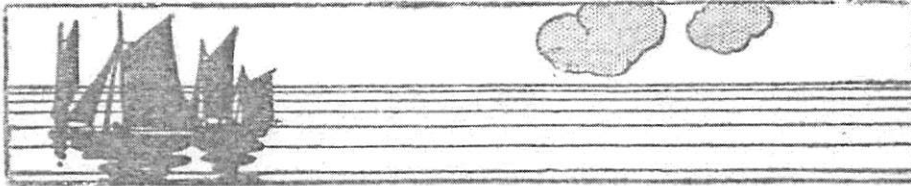
He was aware of an amused challenge in Mrs. Richmond's eyes. He suspected her of proposing to him the post of dancing uncle, just out of playfulness.

But he was not interested in the daughter.

He said: "How jolly it is to be able to sit in a chair and look at the apple and know that you haven't got to go scrambling up the tree for it."

"Yes, isn't it?" she agreed.

WARWICK DEEPING



WHEN MAGIC DIES

WHEN Magic dies,
Sometimes you hear
Under new skies,
Desolate—clear—

The haunting echo
Of an old tune
That set you dancing
Under the moon—

Far—far away.
If you are wise
You will not stay
When magic dies.

NORAH NISBET.

THE STORY-TELLER

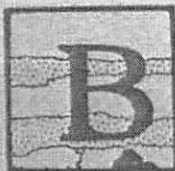
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Speed

MAY 1927

By Warwick Deeping

"Get in," said he.
She looked at him again and got in.
'They wouldn't let me pass . . . When I tried to rush it—they pulled over—deliberately . . . I had to take the ditch.'
'We'll have a look at them,' said Billy.
In twenty seconds he had the Stukely doing fifty . . . "



BEING at a tennis party at the Gooches', Miss Eileen Ramsden, who, at two-and-twenty kept a very frank blue eye upon life and humanity, asked Sybil Gooch a question.

"Anybody seen the new 'Park' people yet?"

Yes, Sybil had seen them. Lady Gooch and the Frenshams had mutual friends, and Lady Gooch and her daughter had called on the Frenshams.

"Going to be of any use to us?"

"Not much—I think."

"How's that? What's the *ménage*?"

"Mother and son."

Eileen adjusted a white stocking. She had that complete air of sophistication that is so delightful and so deceptive.

"Doesn't sound so bad. What's the lad like? Any good at games? We're so beastly short of men whom you can put into a decent mixed double."

Sybil Gooch was powdering her nose.

"Oh, he's quite a babe, not thirty. Absolute 'rabbit'—I gather."

"They all are. It's a scandal. What's he do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Nothing of any importance. I believe he has published a book or two."

"Good lord!"

"Rather a French atmosphere."

"What—the books?"

"No, the *ménage*. Devoted son, adoring mother."

"How disgusting!"

"Why?"

"It's not done in these days. Seems to me we shall have to cut out the men, or collect them as 'rabbits' and make 'em play men's fours. There's not a man in the neighbourhood who's under eight at golf. As for dancing —"

Miss Gooch shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, they're a dud crowd."

Woodshot was less than thirty miles from town, but it did matter to Woodshot who lived at the "Park," or "Beech Hall," or "Flashets," or "Oakfield," or "Cornerways." When you have in a neighbourhood some dozen houses that are possible, and half of them are inhabited by duds, the opportunities of life are restricted. Eileen would have condemned it as a waste of good houses and of tennis courts. You had every right to expect your neighbours either to be interesting or good at games, preferably the latter. If they were neither, you had a legitimate grouse.

So Eileen was prepared to despise Billy Frensham before she saw him, a fellow who had pots of money, and just tootled about after his mother, and wrote books. She supposed that he wore spectacles, which he did. He was one of those bland, round, shortish, rather shy young men who go pink on occasions, a disgusting habit in the

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year nineteen-hundred-and-twenty-seven! He looked both dull and droll, though his drollness was more of a vice than a virtue. Eileen began by thinking it virtuous, which showed that she was not so sophisticated as she thought she was.

She first met him at Beech Hall. He was there with his mother, who was not what Eileen had expected her to be, having an air of insouciant and happy fragility. Eileen and Billy played tennis together as partners. He played very badly. She told him so.

"Why don't you follow up your service?"

"Ought I to?"

"Of course—though—as a service—it isn't anything worth talking about."

"Well—I told you I was a 'rabbit'."

"Why don't you have a few lessons? Even a 'rabbit'—"

His blue eyes looked at her with apparent innocence.

"I shall only have to play with you—and I shall get them. So why pay a pro?"

Well—really! She observed him more closely, wondering whether this was cheek or facetiousness, but he smiled at her with a round, infant smile. Did he realise that she had won the open singles at Lensford, and that she had every right to wear a blanket coat and to carry three rackets? And next year she was entering for Wimbledon. She would be able to pose on the steps of the All England Club like Betty Boxall and other prodigies.

"Thank you," she said, "but my coach won't let me play with 'rabbits.' Mucks up your game."

"Of course. Very good of you to play to-day."

"Oh—one has to sometimes."

"A magnanimous gesture."

Again she observed him suspiciously. He did not look ironical. Certainly he had no right to look ironical, and as they strolled towards the house for tea she talked to him like an elder sister.

"You write books, don't you?"

"Occasionally—"

"I don't think I have read any."

"Never mind, you are quite young.

If you like I'll lend you one. It's an excursion into the fourth dimension."

She looked bored, and changed the subject, and happening to notice a big grey car standing in the Beech Hall drive under the shade of the trees, she asked him if he knew to whom it belonged.

"Oh—yes—I can tell you that."

"It's your mother's?"

"No—mine."

"Isn't it a Stukely?"

"It is."

"Why—they're the fastest things on the road."

"Thereabouts."

"What can you do?"

He looked at her with that air of innocence.

"Oh—I never do more than twenty-five. My mother doesn't like it."

She supposed that her contempt was complete. To own and drive a "Stukely" and to limit yourself to a pottering twenty-five miles an hour because your mother did not approve of fast driving! Well, really! Could you conceive anything more pusillanimous? Woodshot Park was a wash-out.

Later—Miss Ramsden had a short conversation with his mother. Mrs. Frensham was petite and fragile; she had a soft brown eye; she appeared to enjoy life. Her sense of humour was veiled.

"I like to watch you young things playing tennis."

Young things, indeed!

"We take our games—seriously," said Eileen.

"Yes—life is a kind of game."

Eileen described Mrs. Frensham afterwards as "A nice little woman," but what Mrs. Frensham thought of Eileen was expressed less obviously. She may have used such words as "The beautiful crude frankness of youth," but she did believe that crude frankness was preferable to sly affectation. Eileen's fundamentals were as blue as her eyes.

But some time in August coincidence took a hand at the table. Billy Frensham, out alone in the "Stukely" on the London-Brighton road, came

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suddenly upon a small two-seater nicely ditched, with a girl in a white blanket coat standing beside it and looking fierce and flurried.

Billy pulled up and raised his hat to Miss Ramsden.

"Had a skid? Can I be——"

She looked at him and his car. She was in a really fine Amazonian rage.

"You could be. A damned char-a-banc drove me into a ditch. Full of beastly trippers. Did it on purpose."

"I say!"

"I didn't get the brute's number. If I could——"

"What about your car?"

"She won't run away."

"Get in," said he.

She looked at him sceptically.

"They were doing thirty, lumbering all over the road like a drunken elephant. You only do twenty-five."

"Get in," said he.

She looked at him again and got in.

"They wouldn't let me pass. All of those nice people laughing and yelling. When I tried to rush it—they pulled over—deliberately—and pinched me off. I had to take the ditch."

"We'll have a look at them," said Billy.

In twenty seconds he had the Stukely doing fifty, and on a straight stretch he pushed the big car to sixty-five. Moreover, he handled her as though he had driven her that way before. Eileen sat up and took notice.

"How will this do?"

"Ripping! We'll catch them in a minute. The thing happened just before you came along."

Taking a long hill like a live shell on wheels the Stukely topped the crown of it and showed a big blue char-a-banc pounding down the further slope.

"That's it."

Billy Frensham smiled.

Fifty yards away from the motor-coach he began sounding his electric horn. The sound provoked instant joy in the char-a-banc's back seats. Faces displayed themselves, bottles, little red flags.

"Ere's another of 'em!"

"Ruddy plutocrats!"

Billy hurtled on.

"Get the number. I'm going to pass."

"They'll baulk you. Look—they're swerving over."

"Let 'em. I know this road. There's a broad stretch a quarter of a mile on. This lady jumps when you want her to!"

He hooted. And the char-a-banc kept to the off-side of the road, and the back seats jeered, and proffered ironical beer bottles.

"Goin' to Brighton, old lad?"

"You keep behind us, and we'll take you there."

But when the road broadened the driver of the char-a-banc indulged in a mocking swerve to the left. It was an invitation to Billy to try to pass. Lured in he would be pinched out by a counter-swerve. So the playful driver of the "charry" thought. But he did not know the machine behind him, nor the way the Stukely's engine could accelerate. Billy took that treacherous gap. The big car went by the char-a-banc like a streak of grey light.

"Oh—great!" said a voice.

"Got the number?"

"Yes."

"Right. I'm going to stop. There's a narrow place further on."

Three-hundred yards clear of the char-a-banc where the road ran through a deepish cutting, he slowed down and stopped with the Stukely slewed diagonally across the road. He had the char-a-banc blocked. He and Eileen sat and looked at each other.

"What are you going to do?"

"Say a word to that driver. We've got him—you know. Two independent witnesses——"

The char-a-banc pulled up within a yard of the Stukely. It was full of nice, animated faces.

"Hi—what's your game?"

Said Billy quite politely to the driver of the char-a-banc:

"We've got your number, my friend. You drove this lady's car into the ditch, and you tried to do the same to me. You'll come up before the East Minstead bench, I imagine. They are rather hot on road-hogs."

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Meanwhile, being a wise man and a Forsyte, he removed his spectacles and passed them to Miss Ramsden.

"Mind holding these? If they shy bottles, you know."

He smiled at her. He was smiling when the driver of the char-a-banc descended and came to the side of the car.

"I don't want any of your ruddy lip. Get art of my way!"

"Much better take it quietly. You've been drinking. That means quad without the option."

"I'll punch your ruddy head! You and your ruddy swank machine. You get out of the way of the 'people's motor-car.'"

Billy got out of his own car.

"You said something about punching heads."

It was not at all an unseemly affair, for when the char-a-banc champion let fly at Billy, nothing happened to Mr. Frensham. But something very obvious and sudden happened to the other fellow. He was still in the road, thinking about getting up, and showing no enthusiastic haste, when Billy resumed his seat in the Stukely, and drove serenely away.

"Mind slipping on my glasses for me?"

"I say—you——"

She adjusted his spectacles.

"You laid that blackguard—out—like——"

"Oh—I used to box a bit up at Cambridge. Boxed for the 'varsity. Got your evidence all right?"

"He threatened you and then struck at you, and you knocked him down."

"That's it. Of course we shall have that whole car-load perjuring themselves, but the chairman of the East Minstead bench is not exactly a fool."

She sat up and took much notice.

"Well—really! I think you're—— But where are we going now?"

"Just as far as Minstead. Report to the police. Then we'll return and extricate your car."

The police stopped the buccaneering char-a-banc in Minstead High Street, and the driver thereof—with an incipient black eye and a breath that was

perfumed, was interviewed and listened to. Every person on the char-a-banc was ready to swear that the driver had never deviated from his side of the road, but when the case came before the Minstead "bench," not one of those happy warriors appeared. The man with the black eye was fined ten pounds and costs, and had his driving licence suspended for six months.

"Perhaps that will larn you," was the pith of the chairman's comment, though he did not express it in those very words.

At the conclusion of the proceedings Billy drove Miss Eileen Ramsden back to Woodshot. It would seem that she had forgotten his bad tennis and his bookishness, and almost she was deferential. He drove the Stukely like a lamb. The speedometer needle appeared stuck at 25.

She said: "Aren't we sedate to-day?"

"Naturally," he replied. "We have been in a court of justice seeing the unjust chastened."

"Ever had your licence endorsed?"

"Never."

She meditated.

"I should have thought—— Was that a solitary occasion?"

That droll and quiet smile of his appeared.

"Oh—now and again—perhaps. When I have been alone, and little snooky cars would keep coming up and hooting behind me."

"Little snooky cars?"

"The sort that are driven by lads in these tam-o'-shanter things with tassels. Generally all red and silver, and with a lot of smell."

"They annoy you."

"No, they don't annoy me; they just make me feel mischievous."

When he dropped her outside the porch of "Plashets," she looked admiringly at the Stukely's long and speedy lines, and then she looked at Billy.

"I should love to see you being mischievous."

"Would you?"

"Rather."

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"What about next Sunday? Oh, I forgot, you'll be at church, or you'll be playing tennis."

"Neither."

"Say I call for you at eleven? Suppose we lunch at Lyndhurst or the Balmer Lawn?"

"All that way?"

"Oh—well—you know, we are going to be mischievous."

Sunday was a pearl of a day, and at eleven o'clock Billy and the Stukely were waiting for her at "Plashets." Nobody objected to the adventure, for Eileen managed her own affairs, and it was becoming increasingly apparent that Billy was quite capable of managing his.

"Got enough clothes on? I mean—are you sufficiently warmly clad?"

"I hope so."

He tucked a rug round her, and she allowed him to exercise this male attention.

"I have just taken the mater to church. She said that she could walk back."

"I like your mother," said Eileen.

"Well—so do I."

The Stukely glided through Woodshot with Sabbath restraint.

"Basingstoke-Salisbury road—I think. Turn off at Basingstoke for Winchester."

He continued to drive the Stukely at a stately twenty miles an hour. He had an air of droll gravity.

"Not feeling cold?"

"Hardly. Not feeling mischievous—are you?"

"No occasion just at present. Wait till we reach the big black highway. Of course we may not be provoked. Supposing I leave it to you."

"Just how?"

"We do an imperturbable and steady twenty-five miles unless something impertinent occurs."

"What am I to do?"

"You maintain observation—towards the rear. If you hear anything snorting and squealing—"

"Yes."

"Just say 'snooky.'"

"Just—'snooky.'"

"That's it. And the Dowager will

be on her dignity. She's quite dignified at seventy."

"The Dowager! What a topping name!"

"Yes, seventy, and always on top."

The provocations of the road are dependent upon the personality of the driver, and Billy Frensham was neither arrogant nor impatient, and like his car he had unexpected reserves of power. It is the little men and the little machines who snort and squeal and tumble over themselves in the attempt to appear bigger and faster than they are. And Billy, as he drove with dignity and good humour, argued that the art of driving slowly and courteously is a much more subtle craft than hogging it. The fellow who just trod on the accelerator was a clumsy boor.

"Just glide—glide, that's the idea."

He let a number of cars pass him, waving them on with a kind of benignant tolerance.

"All C.C.'s."

"What's that mean?"

"Courteous Cars. It's the fellow who tries to hoot you off the road, or the fellow who comes sneaking up to pass you without a word of warning or a by-your-leave. Well—I get ironical."

There was a kind of vomiting yell behind them. Eileen looked back.

"Snooky."

Billy had one eye on the mirror.

"Yes—I observe. Red paint, gollywog, tassels, dirty raincoats. Four-cylinder Young-fellah-my-lad. French. Much smell and no silence. Yes, yes."

The hooting behind them was rude and incessant. Billy put the Stukely up to thirty, and drew over towards the near side.

"Shall we snook them?"

"Cheek! One of them winked at me."

"I think that's sufficient."

Billy allowed the pseudo Grand Prix contraption to come up till the gollywog was level with his spare wheel, and then he let the Stukely go.

"Don't look round. It isn't dignified."

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"Of course I'm not going to look round."

"I can see 'em in the mirror. Bumping about. I wonder how long those snookies last in the hands of young-fellah-my-lads."

"Where are they?"

"Oh—somewhere behind, doing fifty and feeling like a hundred. They are cursing me for a nasty, arrogant, swanking Jew. They shouldn't have blown that trumpet as though we were the walls of Jericho."

She glanced at him—as she had never glanced at any Wimbledon "elegant."

"I say—you are funny."

"Funny?"

"I don't mean funny—I mean funny."

"Oh, just like that! Rather subtle, isn't it?"

"You do say such lovely things."

They neither heard nor saw anything more of the Young-fellah-my-lad, nor was the Sabbath calm disturbed by howling adventures. The Dowager continued her stately glide, and only once was she put upon her dignity by a light Ford lorry out on a festive occasion and rigged up with seats occupied by jovial and harmless proletarians. The young women on the seats offered Billy bananas and challenged him to race.

He raised his hat.

"Ladies first."

He throttled down the Stukely until she was doing a noiseless and solemn glide at six miles an hour, and the Ford lorry vanished into the summer greenness.

"There is," he said, "a subtlety of slowness as well as a splendour of speed. Does this processional pace intrigue you?"

"It has—distinction."

"Especially so when tin can jolt and jostle. Observe, there are two methods of eliminating noisy competition, by going very fast—and by going very slowly. Slow driving—like slow dancing—means balance—rhythm."

"Do you dance?"

"Just a little."

"Don't think me—rude, Billy, but do you dance like you drive a car, or like you play tennis?"

He gave her a whimsical look.

"I think—that—is a matter for experiment. If you would care to go up to the Knick-Knack Club one evening——"

"I'd love to."

After a very pleasant lunch at the Balmer Lawn they wandered over the forest turf.

Said she: "Billy, why do you drive so slowly, when your mother—? Is it that she——?"

He looked at the tops of the trees.

"My mother's not very strong. She won't allow it; she makes no fuss. She'd let me go fifty if I wanted to. But then—you see—I happen to know."

"That it wouldn't be good for her?"

"Exactly."

"And does she know?"

"She thinks I have a temperamental prejudice against fast driving."

"You pretend——?"

"I suppose so."

"But really——?"

"I love—speed. It's got a thrill—a splendour. It gives you a sense of lightness and of power. Decent speed—I mean. I took the machine round Brooklands track—once."

"Did you?"

"She touched ninety-three. But I say—that's a dead secret. She—doesn't know."

"She won't know," said Eileen.

For some seconds she had a meditative air. Her blue eyes looked into blue distances. Then the frankness of her demanded self-expression.

"Billy, I think you are rather a dear."

"Do you!" said he with a slight pinkiness.

"If you like—I'll coach you at tennis."

"That's a good gesture. You don't want me to teach you to box, do you?"

"No, Billy. But I should like to drive your car, just once—of course. I'll be very careful."

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"She wondered whether he hated her sisters. She hoped that he did, and she hoped it with fervour, for if he did not hate them it would mean that he was a failure in soul as well as in material things. She felt that if he did not hate her sisters she would hate him."



R. HARVEY KELLOGG was a man of ideas. Even in an age of extraordinary crudities and equally extraordinary upheavals Mr. Harvey Kellogg's ideas were the products of a happy and vigorous inspiration. It is not sufficient to say that Mr. Kellogg had managed to acquire many things when other people were losing them. He had been destined to be what he was. Somewhere he had stumbled upon that saying of Napoleon's, "I am an ancestor," and, applauding, he had adopted it.

To begin with, a man must conquer and possess himself of material things, but they are the foundations upon which a more dignified and reticent building should be built. Mr. Harvey Kellogg understood this, as a man understands that he must not suck at his soup spoon or pick up peas on his knife in a certain grade of society. Mr. Kellogg knew that it is necessary to impress the world, but it was the necessary reticence in the doing of it that bothered him. It is not easy to be able to do everything you please, and yet to do it with restraint.

His womenfolk did not help him. At least the only one of them who was capable of helping him was still lost in a phase of sensitive bewilderment, and she was too young to count. Ruth Kellogg was submerged under the Roman triumph of her mother and her sisters, roped to

their chariot, staggering under the spoils.

It had been a period of swift expansiveness, and Ruth had felt what a primrose might have felt had it been torn out of a hedgerow and told that its business in life was to become a pæony. She was not a pæony; she had none of the attributes of a pæony; she watched the others expand, and she felt bewildered.

She watched her mother enlarge into huge hats with red roses.

Everything became enlarged—their house, their car, their servants. Their house was in Berkeley Square; their car was the only car that Mr. Kellogg could be expected to drive in. They had a butler who was the most solemnly portentous thing Ruth had ever seen, and who went about with an air of vast discretion, as though he were picking up Mrs. Harvey Kellogg's dropped h's and hiding them surreptitiously in his pocket.

Mrs. Kellogg would not adapt. She was just an enlarged and more glorious edition of the licenced victualler's daughter whom Mr. Harvey Kellogg had married thirty years ago. She had called him "Arvey" all her life, and even though he could retort with a flawless "Harriet," why should a woman of Mrs. Kellogg's calibre trouble to change?

But it annoyed Mabel and Kathleen. Like their father, they were young women of ideas. They would have preferred their mother silent; they had even dared to suggest that there were occasions when silence might be more impressive. And of

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course there was a family row. Mrs. Kellog was not the woman to suffer a happy and genial loquacity to be suppressed by a couple of chits, though they did belong to a fashionable club somewhere off Piccadilly, and played golf, and went to Hurlingham, and danced at the Ambassador's. Mr. Kellog had to play the emperor. If Madame Sans-Gêne chose to be Madame Sans-Gêne—well, damn it, she should be. But for her Miss Mabel and Miss Kathleen would have had less reality than a washing-basket.

Ruth watched all this, and had no part in it. She liked to sneak off to a concert at Queen's Hall, or go and look at pictures, or even watch grubby little children playing in the park. She had no display. She was rather pale and dark and silent and soft-eyed. She was her father's favourite, but neither of them knew it. Mr. Kellog had not realized her. She was still the delicate baby who had kept him awake at night, and who had drawn from him an angry and protesting tenderness. He thought of her as the "Kid," and somehow different from the others. Augustus, the son—the cynosure—was at Eton, but there were times when Harvey Kellog felt a fierce desire to clout Augustus's head. He criticized his father's ties—at least Mr. Kellog felt that he criticized them.

Ruth was aware of the family's ascent, its aggressive expansion. It pushed; it was seen; it was felt, and sometimes she shivered. She found herself involved in what were to her humiliations. She saw a queer expression in other people's eyes. There was that day on the Portsmouth road when their car, flagrantly hogging it with the Kellogs' pet cad at the wheel, had cut the wing off a little grey two-seater. She remembered the face of the man who had been driving the smaller car—a thin and rather humorous face. She remembered his almost too quiet politeness, like a little piece of steel in the glare of the Kellog arrogance. He had

despised them, their rudeness, their cocksureness, their assumption that it was impossible for people with so much money to be in the wrong.

About that time Mr. Harvey Kellog exploded a series of ideas.

He may have been aware of certain personal limitations, and he may have meditated upon them. At all events, he woke his wife up about one o'clock on a winter morning and confided to her that his education had not been very complete. He seemed troubled.

"Between you and me, old girl, I hadn't the chances we are giving the boy. There are a lot of things I don't know."

His wife assured him that she had not noticed these deficiencies.

"It's a fact," he grumbled, "though I wouldn't let on about it to anyone but you. Even that boy of mine makes me feel ignorant."

"He'll never be the man you are, 'Arvey."

"I want to go into Parliament," said her man.

"Well, go in. Who's going to keep you out?"

"I might keep myself out, old girl."

"Do you mean, 'Arvey, that you are not sufficiently educated?"

"That's it."

"Any fool can be an M.P. Besides, you're not a fool. Besides—look at those Labour people."

Mr. Kellog lay and stared into the darkness.

"I've got an idea, Harriet. We ought to travel a bit, the whole family."

"Well, I shouldn't mind. Where would we go to?"

"I've never been out of England in my life."

He seemed to be addressing a listening universe, and his wife pulled him back to facts.

"The places? Where would we go to?"

"Oh, Paris, and Monte Carlo, and Rome and Naples, and Egypt. Why not?"

"Let's begin with Egypt and work backwards," said the lady.

The Prince on Hire

"I've got another idea, mother."

"What's that?"

"I ought to have a secretary."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Kellog.

"A man secretary, the sort of chap who knows things. And if he had a title—there wouldn't be anything wrong with him having a title."

"No, I can see no harm in it, my dear."

After that they went to sleep.

Mr. Kellog still had much of the boy about him. He liked to surprise his family, to come home with an air of sly secretiveness, and then to let off some bombshell, but of late he had found his fireworks apt to fizzle. The two elder girls were young women whom he was finding it increasingly difficult to impress. Unlike their mother, they had ceased to utter an admiring and wondering "O-oh!" when Mr. Kellog let off a rocket. The young gentleman at Eton was indecently and superiorly silent. "Another of the old man's bricks!" But if a very human fellow cannot count on his own family giving him some applause, of what use is a family?

Mr. Kellog prepared his rocket.

Ruth was the first to observe its ascent. The family had dispersed itself, and she was enjoying a lonely tea and book by the library fire when a taxi stopped outside the house. A young man got out of the taxi, a foreign-looking young man. He had a suit-case in one hand and a despatch-box in the other.

Two minutes later Soames, the butler, appeared in the library with a card on a silver tray. He looked solemn and suspicious.

"There is a young gentleman below, miss, with some luggage. He says he is expected here."

Ruth took the card, and on it she read "Prince Nicholas Soborski." She glanced at Soames, and Soames returned the look.

"A Russian, miss. In the absence of Mr. Kellog, I feel responsible."

"You mean, Soames, that you—"

"One never knows, miss, in these days whether a man is a duke or a burglar."

"But what does he want?"

"He says, miss, that he is Mr. Kellog's new secretary."

"Secretary!"

"Yes, miss."

Ruth considered the problem, with her book lying open and face downwards over one knee.

"I think you had better ask him up, Soames. He may like some tea. After all—I could ring the bell."

"Just as you please, miss. I'll put Robert to sit in the hall, and I shall keep close to the telephone, handy to call the police."

"I am sure that I have perfect confidence in you, Soames."

The young man was brought by Soames into the library. He was dark, pale, slightly built, with gentle eyes and a slightly receding forehead, and on his forehead, just above the root of the nose, three sharp lines seemed to cut deep into the skin. It was as though life had stamped a mark there. Ruth Kellog found something strange about him directly he entered the room, something arrestive, something vaguely appealing. She thought that he looked frightened. She did not know that tragedy had entered this grossly successful house; the tragedy of a sensitiveness that has suffered terrible things, and that shrinks from certain people, certain dreads, certain humiliations.

He stood looking at her with his gentle eyes. It was as though she surprised him as much as he surprised her. And then he remembered to bow.

"It seems that I am not expected."

She held out a hand to him.

"My father's memory is very uncertain. Please sit down. You will have some tea?"

He sat down at a little distance from the fire, and there was something in his way of doing it that touched her. She was as quick and as sensitive as he was, and his attitude suggested timidity, the timidity of a dog who feared kicks. She felt that he had suffered, and that suffering had made him afraid.

"I will ring for some fresh tea."

"Oh, no, please. It will do very well."

But she rang for fresh tea. Her instinct told her that the world had been giving him the dregs.

"You speak English very well," she said, when they were alone again.

"Yes," he said; "yes, we Russians are quick at languages. It was lucky for me that Mr. Kellog—"

Ruth had a slight frown on her forehead. She was beginning to understand. This poor piece of aristocratic wreckage was to be trailed behind the Kellog chariot.

"Of course. We are going abroad, to travel."

"That is what Mr. Kellog told me. I presume—that you—"

She smiled and encouraged a half-hesitating smile.

"I am the youngest Miss Kellog. My name is Ruth. Yes, we are going to travel, and you are going to help us."

She saw a queer softness come into his eyes. Her touch was delicate, and he had found such delicate touches rare in the life of a submerged refugee.

"It will be a pleasure."

She glanced at him almost sharply. Her impulse was to tell him the truth, but she found that she could not do it, that she had not the heart to do it.

"We are a rather noisy family, rather abrupt. You must not mind that."

He raised his eyebrows slightly. He had seen the father and he had seen her, and Kellog, genial, bumptious, pink-faced and white-haired, had struck him as a down-right, brusque, but not unkindly, person. If the rest of the family were anything like her— Yet did it matter? There would be one who's touch was sensitive.

"Oh, I am not thin-skinned." And he gave a wry, little noiseless laugh. "I have done many things. When one has washed dishes, and played the fiddle in a—"

He broke off, aware of a half-shrinking look in her eyes.

"Yes, it is not good to speak of it. Such things do not come into an English girl's life. But it will be good to travel and to be—"

He shirked the last word, but somehow she guessed it.

"Please let me give you some more tea," she said, glancing at his hands and noticing that they were clean.

So this broken aristocrat, this man whom a revolution had pushed into the gutter, became a part of the Kellog household, something a little better than a servant, but without a servant's power of self-defence. Society had been inverted. The "sensitive" was underneath. He had found his skin too thin for the boots that had trodden on him; he had struggled and floundered, and gone down and down. He had sold things in the streets of Constantinople, washed dishes in a Paris hotel, and when Harvey Kellog had unearthed him he was playing first violin in a London night club. Prince Nicholas Soborski, aristocrat, one-time captain in a crack cavalry regiment, now secretary and gentleman courier to Harvey Kellog, Esq.!

The family sailed for Egypt, taking with it much baggage, and a rather tired little man with soft eyes whom they patronized as they pleased. They hoisted him like a flag, or erected him like an advertising hoarding. "Our Tame Prince, taught to fetch and carry." Kellog had not been ungenerous to Soborski. He had given him a cheque and told him to go to a West End tailors and make himself presentable. No, Soborski did not mind Harvey Kellog. It was Mrs. Kellog and the two girls who made the iron enter into his soul.

In the Bay he fell sick. The Kellog ladies, with the exception of Ruth, bloomed on deck like healthy pæonies and never missed a meal. Already they had got into the way of making Mr. Kellog's secretary fetch and carry for them. They called him Soborski, referred to him as "Prince" or "Nick," and treated him like a pet valet, for it was

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rather intriguing to be waited on by a prince. He fetched chairs, collected rugs, and was always in search of Mrs. Kellog's work-bag.

There happened a rough day, with the sun shining in a hard blue sky, and as usual Mrs. Kellog had mislaid her work-bag.

"Where's Soborski? I want my bag."

Soborski had been invisible since breakfast. There were reasons. The two girls looked cruel and amused.

"He's not feeling very well, ma."

"Nonsense! On a fine day like this! I want him to find my bag."

Soborski was disinterred from his bunk by a steward, who informed him that he was wanted on deck.

"But—it is impossible," said the poor wretch.

"That's your affair," said the steward.

The Russian gathered himself together and went. He hated these women—oh, how he hated them! He hated them with his surging stomach, with his soul's nausea, and with his swimming head. He appeared before them cold, shivering, green and yellow.

"Soborski, I want my bag."

He gave her the look of a fierce yet dying dog.

"I will find it, madam."

He reeled about the ship, suppressing infinite disaster. He found the bag and carried it to Mrs. Kellog.

"Your bag, madam."

They did not observe that he was heroic. They saw only a comic figure yearning to be sick.

"You don't look very well, Prince."

"Madam, my health is perfect."

He returned to his cabin and surrendered to his body, and in the throes he cursed them.

"Beef, cow-faces, red radishes! Oh, holy saints! Oh, Son of God! But she was not there! She has the soul to be sick—too! May God bless her."

Of Egypt there is little to tell. The family stayed at Shepherds, haggled and drank tea in the

bazaar, visited the Pyramids, went up the Nile, smelt the smell of the dark skins and disliked it. They sojourned at Luxor. They displayed and made use of Soborski. They returned to Cairo and again visited the Sphinx and Pyramids.

And here a certain incident did occur, though its significance was limited to the understandings of two people. It happened that Ruth and her father's secretary had escaped together from the family and were sitting gazing at the Sphinx. Soborski had had a dog's day of it; he had had to carry the camera, one or two overcoats and Mrs. Kellog's guide-book, and during lunch—for they had brought a lunch with them and picnicked on the sand—Soborski had been kept jumping up and running round with plates or a wine bottle. He looked tired, but with a certain imperturbability that hid much feeling.

"It is the fashion to marvel at the Sphinx," said Ruth. "Do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"I wonder why?"

"I think—because it has a face of stone. Nothing disturbs it."

She understood that he sometimes wished to be like that—stony-faced, ironical, insensitive. She wondered whether he hated her sisters. She hoped that he did, and she hoped it with fervour, for if he did not hate them it would mean that he was a failure in soul as well as in material things. She felt that if he did not hate her sisters she would hate him. He would wear the slimy coat of the consenting parasite, and she did not wish to think of him as that.

"Pray God he will lose his temper some day," she thought.

Soborski was nursing his knees.

"I should like to come here by moonlight," he said, "and speak to that thing on the violin."

"What would you say?"

"Oh, something mocking!"

"Surely something more than that?"

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"Perhaps. Something tender. I should feel it smile."

"At your tenderness?"

"It would understand. But I would like to ask it if it has ever felt fear, not the fear one felt in the war."

"What sort of fear?"

"The fear a sensitive wretch feels in a great city at night when it rains, and he has no shirt, no dinner to eat, and no bed to go to. That is the worst sort of fear."

"And you have felt that?" she said gently.

"Oh, yes! And when life grows a little warmer one is still afraid—afraid of slipping back into the horror of being under the wheels of the machine, in the mud, dirty, miserable, abject. Oh—yes!"

She looked at the stone face of the Sphinx.

"It is being alone—down there—that must be horrible."

"I don't know," he said. "Wouldn't it be more horrible if the woman you loved had blue toes in her old boots and no chemise?"

From Egypt the family voyaged to Naples, and here Soborski was held responsible for the plundering rascality of certain swarthy scoundrels who put them ashore in a boat. The Kellogs had no Italian, though Ruth knew a little.

"What! It's sheer brigandage! You ought to have stood up to them, man."

Soborski kept his temper.

"What did the scoundrel say?" they demanded.

The Russian could not tell Mr. Kellog that the Neapolitans had sworn that they deserved a hundred lire for each fat cow of an American.

"Damned dagos!" said Harvey Kellog. "You ought to have called in the police."

Naples bored the Kellogs. It rained, it blew and was most exasperatingly cold, and Harvey Kellog had a row with the manager over the heating of the hotel. The manager spoke very little English, and with Mr. Kellog quite absent in Italian, Soborski was called in

and was abused by both of them. He took it philosophically. Kellog might be an old ruffian, but he was not a bad sort. It was Mr. Kellog's womenfolk who made Soborski wonder whether after all there was not something in Bolshevism.

They went on to Rome, and Rome was sunny and mellow and beautiful. Soborski had to take Mabel and Kathleen to *thes dansantes*, but on their acquiring certain male devotees there he became superfluous and discovered more freedom. Mr. Kellog played golf, and Mrs. Kellog was suppressed by a bad cold. Soborski was able to wander; a change came over him; his eyes had a dreamy look, as though they were happy with looking at things that he loved. Nor were his wanderings taken wholly in solitude. He and Ruth met at their own good pleasure, on the Saniculum, in the Protestant Cemetery or the Princian Gardens, and one afternoon they escaped to Tivoli and were sad together among the cypresses of the Villa d'Este.

For Soborski had a measure of pride. Whatever he might be feeling he seemed to wish to prove to her that he was no adventurer, and that though she was kind to him he respected her kindness.

"I'm a fatalist, you know," he said, "but even a fatalist has scruples. Ten years ago I thought that nothing but good things would ever happen to me, but now—I know otherwise. It is possible that I may go back to my fiddle."

She was startled, but she understood him.

"After all—it is—your—fiddle."

"Yes," he said, "it is. And when I am not fiddling I can go and watch the children playing, or the boats on the river, or scribble at my novel in a Soho attic."

"I rather like to think of you in that way," she said.

From Rome the Kellogs went to Florence, and from Florence by way of Genoa to Monte Carlo, where they put up at the Hôtel Magenta. Soborski knew Monte Carlo too

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well; he had a horror of the place; it irritated him and depressed him with memories of a tragic week when he had sold his last jewel and tried his luck at the tables. He had lost everything save one ten franc note. He could remember sitting on a seat in the Monaco gardens and trying to decide whether he should throw himself over the cliff, but he had remained on the seat. Afterwards he told himself that he had been a coward, and that a braver man would have ended it. His fear of the world and all the nameless things that the world could make him suffer dated from that day when he had been afraid to die.

Not only did Monte Carlo mock and sneer at him, but the Kellog family seemed to grow more exasperating and more exacting. He had to play many parts. He appeared to combine the duties of *valet de chambre*, *chasseur*, dancing partner, courier, secretary, man of the world. Mrs. Kellog sent him to keep a chair for her at the tables. Mabel and Kathleen took him to the Café de Paris, and were annoyed if the table he had been told to reserve was not on the edge of the dancing floor. He hired automobiles; he made himself a nuisance at the tennis club; he was expected to know what the exchange was from day to day, and who the yachts in the harbour belonged to. He had to dress up and parade on the terrace, run up to bedrooms for books and cigarette-cases, tie Mr. Kellog's dress tie, and leave the dinner table five minutes before the others in order that he might sit and retain Mrs. Kellog's pet chair in the lounge. He began to feel emasculated and furtive. He was sure that the waiters and the pages and the concierge sniggered at him with ironical scorn. He hated the concierge. The man had an insolent and observant eye.

His pride began to rage in him—the pride that Ruth Kellog had succoured and revived.

"And she sees all this." he

thought; "she sees me sneaking about like a lackey!"

He looked around for a weapon, but he had no weapon. He could not hurt these people, any more than he could have hurt the oiled and horrible beasts who had fooled and exploited poor, ignorant Russia. Yet there was one retort; he could show them that he despised them. But could he do that? Would he not be involving Ruth in some contemptible fracas?

He decided that he would speak privately to Harvey Kellog, and tell him that he did not feel himself suited to be a secretary. He would take a third-class ticket to London, and resume his fiddle and his shabby self-respect. He would not be a sponger, a polite parasite, a hanger-on to the chariot of these new people.

But fate willed it otherwise. This mild and gentlemanly self-effacement was not to be. He was destined to lose his temper, or rather both to lose and to keep it.

It happened in the crowded lounge of the Magenta after lunch. Mrs. Kellog had been denied her favourite chair, and she had left her work-bag in her bedroom. She appeared to use that infernal bag as a sign of her authority over Soborski.

"There, if I 'aven't forgotten my bag!"

She looked at the Russian, who was talking to Ruth, and Soborski paid no attention. He was aware of the fat, blue-chinned concierge standing by his desk and watching him with a kind of malevolent and contemptuous curiosity.

"Soborski," said Mrs. Kellog.

Ruth saw something happening behind Soborski's eyes. He ignored the voice.

"Soborski!"

No response.

"Soborski! Don't you 'ear me! Fetch my bag."

The Russian went very white. He took no notice of the lady, but turned and stood in front of Mr. Kellog.

"Pardon me, sir, but am I your secretary?"

Mr. Kellog stared at him.

"I pay you, don't I?"

"Those who find the money call the tune," said a voice.

The Russian smiled.

"Then, I think," he said, "I prefer to play my own tune. I am sorry. But, of course, it is understood that I pay my own bill here. I am sorry that I cannot fetch your bag, madam."

Mrs. Kellog seemed struggling to say something.

"You're—you're sacked!" she said.

"Pardon me, it is I who am doing the sacking, madam. I think I can claim it as my last and only privilege."

He walked away, and they saw him disappear in the direction of the bureau. Ruth's eyes were shining as though for some strange reason she was extraordinarily happy. People smiled and exchanged glances. The concierge entered his glass case, sat down on his stool and seemed to meditate. Mr. Kellog was very red in the face. The family disengaged itself and went upstairs in a body, and their voices suggested discord.

"I've never been so insulted," Arvey.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Kellog stubbornly, "I'm not sure that the fellow wasn't right. After all—"

He had uncovered himself; he had laid himself open to attack. The odds were three to one, but the more they belaboured him the more obstinate he grew.

"Here, that's enough. There's something in that chap after all. I'm wondering—"

But it did not occur to them to wonder what Ruth was doing, or why she had slipped away to her room.

Prince Nicholas Soborski had accumulated a little money during the last four months, and he was able to pay the last portion of his bill, tip the staff, and contemplate a balance after buying a third-class

ticket to London. He packed, and left orders with the blue-chinned concierge that his trunk was to be sent down to the station and left in the cloakroom. The concierge had become definitely respectful and polite.

"Certainly, sir. At once, sir."

Soborski went out with his overcoat over his arm, without glancing round the lounge or noticing any of the people who were in it. Following the tram lines he walked down the hill to the Condamine, and took the steep path and series of steps that ascend to the headland of Monaco. Some whim was leading him towards that seat in the gardens where he had sat three years ago and felt the fear of death.

He was aware of the blue sea and the blue sky, of the yachts in the harbour, of all those luxurious buildings on the hillside, but he was not aware of people. He looked at no one. He was feeling, thinking, resolving. He accepted sadness and the passion of regret as part of the day's act, as something involved in it, as a result which a fatalist could not control.

"Anyhow," he thought, "she may be able to respect me a little. I don't suppose I shall ever see her again. Even if she had begun to care the family would be too strong for her caring. She's sensitive. She would have no chance with those fishwives."

He found the well-remembered seat, set among shrubs and flowering things on the very edge of the cliff, and poised between blue sea and blue sky. A low grey wall rose in front of it, and Soborski laid his overcoat on this wall. He sat down; he was alone, almost as much alone as he had been three years ago.

His glances went out over the sea. He lit a cigarette and inhaled the smoke meditatively, thinking as he did so that he might never be able to afford expensive cigarettes again. He liked his creature comforts, beautiful things, flowers, pictures, soft carpets, aloofness, some corner where vulgar voices did not pene-

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trate. Well, he was going back to grime and the smell of garlic, to live among people who did not wash with undue frequency. He remembered the smell of those Soho stairs, the shirts and other garments that were hung up to dry on pieces of string.

"Horrible!" he thought. "And yet a man need not have a stuffy soul. But I should have liked to see her again sometimes."

He was suddenly aware of a movement near him. A woman was sitting down on the seat, and he was conscious of a pang of annoyance. He gave her one quick glance, and then let his cigarette fall to the ground.

"You!" said his eyes. "You!"

She looked pale and a little tense, but she managed to smile.

"I wanted to thank you," she said.

"Thank me! But for what?"

"For losing your temper and keeping it."

He made a little movement, a movement of restlessness, of protest. She spoke again.

"Didn't you know that I wanted you to lose it?"

"No. But perhaps—I did. But I didn't lose it on purpose. No. I'm not quite so subtle a cad."

"Oh, I know that!" she said. "But don't you see that it has made a difference. Oh, don't think me awful!"

Her voice moved him very deeply.

"Awful! Well, do you owe me a little? Yes, there is a difference. I mean that I am different, and that you have made me different. You seem to have given me back my self-respect."

"Have I? But there is another sort of difference. When there is a quarrel doesn't one take sides?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Well, you see, I am on your side. I was on your side from the very

first. I wanted you to lose your temper."

He let his head rest between his hands.

"No," he said half fiercely, "I am not going to say it."

She was silent.

"I am going back to London. I shall have a little money left when I get there. I shall make another fight of it. After all—I shall have two or three clean shirts to wear."

He turned a white and whimsical face to her.

"And something more. But no, I am not going to say it."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because of the family. Oh, and other things, and of what they would say——"

"About me?"

He nodded.

She sat very still.

"You have forgotten one thing," she said.

"What have I forgotten?"

"That certain people are snobs. Oh, yes, in spite of all their new arrogance. And you—you slapped their faces. They may scream, but they will respect you. They may even like being chastised by a——"

He stood up.

"Oh, damnation, but I haven't a penny! No, I love you too much."

"There, you have said it!"

He stared at her.

"No, I won't," he retorted.

She pretended to stare at the sea.

"Then—you are making it rather awkward for me, Nicholas."

"Awkward—for you!"

"Yes, because—I told my father just before I left the hotel that we are engaged."

"My God," said he, "you didn't?"

"I did."

"And what——?"

"Why, he kissed me. He is not a bad sort, you know, underneath."

WARWICK DEEPING.



By Warwick Deeping

24

"Trevenna's face twitched. He turned and looked at the photograph on the piano, and then raised his right hand in a salute to his friend."



R. BRANGWYN had known Trevenna during the war, but when Trevenna walked into Brangwyn's consulting-room the doctor was astonished at the change in him. He looked like a hunted shadow of himself, a thing of fear—restless, jerky, with eyes that were never still.

"I want you to give me something to make me sleep, doc. Dreams, you know. I want to sleep so that I don't dream."

"Sit down, my dear man, and tell me about it."

"You would think me a bit mad—"

"We all have our bits of madness. Besides, a doctor is no use unless he knows."

He pointed Trevenna to one of the big arm-chairs and gave him a cigarette.

"Telling things helps, you know."

"I have bottled up my horror."

"That's wrong. We grown-up kids want to go and blub to someone."

Trevenna's hands gripped his knees.

"Brangwyn, I can tell you. You're not like the ordinary professional fellow. Well, it's like this. My pal Denham got knocked out during the last month of the war. It was my fault in a way, for I had to give him the job, and now I'm always thinking I ought to have done it myself. But that's not the trouble. I saw Jack afterwards—

yes, he was pretty horrible, poor old chap, half his face blown away—well, that's that. But somehow the horror of it got me. I began to dream every night, and the horror gets into the dream. I see—poor old Denham— Oh, God! And then I wake up with a yell, sweating."

"A dream? Nothing else?"

"Ah, that's it. The dream was bad enough, but it is becoming more than a dream. You won't believe me, Brangwyn, when I tell you that it is beginning to get me in broad daylight."

"How?"

"I'm a lawyer, you know, junior partner in an old city firm, and sometimes when I am in the middle of an interview with a client, or dictating a letter to my typist, I see the face. I just sit and stare. Of course, people are beginning to notice things, and I am losing my nerve. I am beginning to shirk the most trifling responsibilities."

"How long has this been going on?"

"About nine months. I took a holiday in the winter and went to Switzerland. I thought a month's skiing and a change would put me right; but in the snow, Brangwyn, I used to see poor Denham's horrible red face."

Brangwyn sat on his desk, for this was not an arm-chair case, but an anguish in which man appealed to man.

"Is there anything at the back of this horror, Trevenna?"

"Nothing—nothing but the feeling that I had about sending Jack in that patrol. Then, too, he was

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a good-looking lad, and perhaps the horrible dead ugliness of him shocked me more than anything else had done during the war. It is as though the whole beastliness of it got me down by the throat."

Brangwyn nodded.

"Ever seen Denham's people?"

Trevenna looked surprised.

"No. What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing. But who are they?"

"His father was a parson-man down in Bucks. His mother was dead; he had one sister."

"What name?"

"The Rev. Augustus Denham; the girl's name was Rose. Beechbury was the village."

He gave the information in a tired and hopeless voice, as though it was without significance, and Brangwyn, sitting very still, stared out of the window.

"Our minds are like picture galleries, Trevenna. Happy, right living means living with the right sort of pictures. The war finished up by landing you with a cubist horror. We have got to take down that particular picture."

Trevenna looked at him with his hunted eyes.

"Yes, but how?"

"That's up to me. I'm not going to give you anything in a bottle. Where are you living?"

"Hatfield Gardens, Kensington."

"Right. Let's see, to-day is Friday. Come and dine with me on Monday. And I want you to try and fix your thoughts on something else. For instance, by a picture, something pleasant and gentle—"

He smiled faintly.

"There is no romance anywhere?"

"You mean a girl?"

"I do."

"No. There couldn't be, Brangwyn, while I am seeing this face."

"You have got to forget that face. Look here, man, can't you try and think of Denham as he was—before—?"

"I have tried. But the other thing blots it out."

Brangwyn sent Trevenna away with a grip of the hand and a few words of courage, and on the Saturday the doctor did what he always did, took his small car and drove out alone for a day and a night in the country. He believed in the healing properties of green leaves. Moreover, he steered by the map for the village of Beechbury, and, finding it trailing a quiet red street in the deeps of a beech-clad valley, he put up at its inn, the White Hart, and sat down in its garden to a village tea.

"Is the rectory far from here?"

The girl who had brought his tea was a Beechbury girl.

"No, sir; just above the church."

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Denham is at home?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He christened my sister's first one last Tuesday."

"Thank you," smiled the doctor.

When he had finished his tea Brangwyn strolled down to the church. The rectory lay above and behind it, a Queen Anne house sheltered by old limes and beeches, its garden sloping upwards towards a sweep of meadow-land. It was utterly English and peaceful, and as Brangwyn walked up the drive and saw the sunlight on the rector's roses, he thought of poor Trevenna and the nightmare of the war.

An elderly servant answered the doctor's ring.

"Is Mr. Denham in?"

No, Mr. Denham was not in; he had gone off on his bicycle to visit a sick parishioner at one of the farms.

"Is Miss Denham in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you take my card and say that I shall be very much obliged to her if she will see me?"

Brangwyn was a man who inspired confidence, and the maid showed him into the drawing-room and went to find Miss Denham. It was a pleasant, shabby room, its windows overlooking part of the garden, a tennis court, and the meadows sloping upwards to the

sky. Brangwyn threw a quick glance round the room, and then moved to the grand piano, for on it he had seen the photograph of a lad in khaki, and he guessed it to be John Denham.

He was looking at the photograph when the door opened, and a girl came in, holding Brangwyn's card. She was beautifully blonde, but with that warm bloneness that goes with healthy eyes and a fine skin; a gentle creature, quietly wise, and rightly called by the Old English name of Rose.

"I hope you will excuse me, Miss Denham. Your father is out, and so I asked to see you. I am a doctor."

She indicated a chair, and, sitting down by the window, calmly surveyed him.

"Would you mind telling me if that is your brother's photograph?"

"Yes."

"You are extraordinarily alike."

"We were twins. Jack was——"

"Yes, I know. And I have come to you about a friend of your brother's. Do you remember a Captain Stephen Trevenna?"

Her face betrayed some emotion.

"Oh, yes, he was Jack's captain and his great friend. He wrote to us—such a kind letter. He seemed very shocked——"

"He was. He has never got over it. May I tell you about Stephen Trevenna? I am his doctor."

"Please do."

So Brangwyn told her all that he had to tell, and she listened with an air of wise pity.

"How terrible for poor Mr. Trevenna. Is it a hopeless case?"

"Not at all. He can be cured."

"You have an idea?"

"I look at it in this way. All the horror of the war—the suppressed terrors and strains of it—have become symbolized for Trevenna in your brother's disfigured face. Forgive me——"

"Please go on. And your idea?"

"Is to replace the symbol: destroy the bad picture and put up the

good. If the sense of horror can be dissipated——"

"I see."

"I came down here wondering whether you could help."

Her eyes questioned him, and then turned to gaze upon her brother's portrait.

"How?"

"May I be frank?"

"Certainly."

"Of course you had letters from your brother. Did he mention Trevenna?"

"Oh, often. He had a great admiration for Captain Trevenna. And afterwards I often wondered why Captain Trevenna never came to see us. My father wrote and asked him to come."

"But—now—his failing to come is understandable."

"Yes—I think it is."

"But supposing, Miss Denham, I could persuade him to come now, would you see him?"

"Of course."

Brangwyn stood up.

"Thank you. I hoped you would say that. I thought you would say it. I have a feeling, Miss Denham, that if I can bring Trevenna here something will happen to him. He will feel the peace of the place. Now, I must see Mr. Denham before anything is done. Can you tell me when I shall find him in?"

"Any time this evening. But perhaps that will be too late?"

"No, I am staying at the White Hart. My idea is to bring Trevenna down with me in my car next week-end, and perhaps you will ask us to tea."

"I am sure that my father will. But you will see him to-night."

Brangwyn was not a little doubtful as to the welcome the rector would give him, but when he saw the Rev. Augustus Denham in the flesh his doubts disappeared. A big, ruddy man with merry eyes held out a large hand, while the other enclosed the bowl of a pipe.

"My daughter has told me about poor Trevenna. I was a little sore

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when he never answered my letter or came to see us."

"Then you have no objection to seeing him now?"

"My dear sir, my poor boy's friend has some claim on us. Bring him with you next Saturday."

Trevenna came to dine with Brangwyn on the Monday; he appeared slightly more cheerful, and when the doctor proposed to him that they should spend the following week-end together, Trevenna welcomed the idea.

"What time do you push off?"

"After lunch on Saturday."

"Splendid. Where do you think of going?"

"Oh, I never make plans. I like to cruise around, and stop where the mood takes me."

"The very thing."

On the Saturday Brangwyn and Trevenna set out in the small car, travelling westwards towards the summer sun. It was a beautiful afternoon, and when London lay some thirty miles behind them, Brangwyn turned north as though to explore fresh country. It was about four o'clock when they trundled into Beechbury, Brangwyn treating the village as a discovery. He pulled up near the church.

"How does this strike you, Trevenna?"

"Charming."

"Supposing we have a look at the local inn?"

"Excellent idea. What's the name of the village?"

"We'll soon find that out."

Brangwyn left Trevenna in the car and went to the White Hart. They had two rooms for him there, and, returning to the car, he smiled at his companion.

"Quite all right. We'll put up here."

He drove into the White Hart yard and garaged the car. Their suit-cases were carried to their rooms, while Brangwyn and Trevenna went to have tea in the garden.

"I say, doctor, this is a sweet

spot. But—what is the name of the village?"

"Beechbury," said Brangwyn, calmly helping himself to jam.

He was aware of Trevenna's startled look.

"Beechbury!"

"Yes. The Denhams expected us to tea at the rectory, but I thought we could stroll round afterwards."

Trevenna half rose from his chair; he looked scared.

"Good heavens! but I can't go there. You ought to have told me——"

"Of course you can go there. We are invited."

"But—how——?"

"My dear chap, I happened to be down here last week-end, and I called on the Denhams. I mentioned you. They are very keen to see you. In fact, they were rather hurt because you have never been to see them."

Trevenna sat down and stared at the doctor.

"Brangwyn, you told them——?"

"I did. They are extraordinarily nice people, my dear man, or I should not have told them. They don't regard you as a stranger. To them you are Jack Denham's great friend. Denham had an admiration for you."

"Who told you?"

"His sister. His letters to her—you know. You'll like her."

Trevenna covered his face with his hands.

"Brangwyn, I can't go. I should see the face there."

"That is exactly what you won't see, my dear chap. I'm so sure of it, that I mean to take you there."

The doctor had his way. He dominated Trevenna for the moment, and about half-past five they walked down the village to the rectory. Trevenna showed some hesitation at the gate, but Brangwyn took him gently by the arm and led him up to the old house.

"My idea of peace," he said. "When I'm old I should like to live in a place like this and grow roses."

Trevenna murmured something about Jack Denham having spoken of the Beechbury roses.

"Or it may have been about his sister."

"Quite likely," said the doctor.

Evidently they were expected, but when Brangwyn and Trevenna were shown into the rectory drawing-room, they found the room empty.

"I'll tell Mr. Denham, sir," said the maid.

"Thank you."

Trevenna was looking round the room with his restless eyes, and suddenly his glance discovered the photograph on the piano. He recoiled a step, and then, as though compelling himself, he approached the piano and stood looking at the portrait of his dead friend. The doctor, aware of his discovery, pretended to be interested in the view from the windows.

"Brangwyn!"

Trevenna's voice was eager.

"Yes?"

"Here's Jack as he was, the real Jack. Good God, to think that I—!"

Brangwyn turned quickly.

"To think that you—! My dear chap, that is what Jack Denham was—and is. The happy warrior with the blue eyes."

"But, Brangwyn, his face—"

"Quiet, man," said the doctor, hearing footsteps outside the door.

It was Rose Denham who entered. She closed the door after her, and smiled at Brangwyn.

"My father will be here in a minute. But we expected you to tea."

"We should have been rather late. Trevenna, this is Miss Denham."

She looked into Trevenna's face and held out a hand.

"I am so glad you have come. We look on you as an old friend."

Trevenna stood speechless. He stared; he made no movement to take her hand, for her likeness to her brother amazed him.

"It's—very—good of you," he stammered.

He continued to stare at her as though she were Jack Denham alive in the flesh. But she was more than that, and Brangwyn, who was watching them, saw Trevenna's dark face flush like the face of a sensitive boy.

Miss Denham withdrew her hand, but not her eyes.

"I have always wanted to see you. My brother talked so much about you, Mr. Trevenna."

Trevenna's eyelids flickered.

"We were great pals. I—was—so badly cut up—"

"Yes," she said quickly, "that letter of yours made me feel that. And Jack's letters had made me feel that I knew you almost as well as he did. You helped him so much."

"I?"

"Yes, in the bad times."

Mr. Denham came into the room, pipe in hand, ruddy and cheerful. He had Trevenna by the hand.

"You have come at last, my dear fellow. We have always expected you some day."

Trevenna rocked on his heels.

"Mr. Denham," he said, "do you realize—that it was I who had to give Jack that order—"

"I knew it."

"You knew it!"

"My boy's last letter—a few words—was written and posted just before he died. I remember some of the words: 'Poor old Stephen had to give me the job. I know that he would rather have gone himself.' So you see, Trevenna, we always knew."

Trevenna's face twitched. He turned and looked at the photograph on the piano, and then raised his right hand in a salute to his friend.

"Dear old pal, you bore me no malice. I'm glad."

He seemed to draw a deep breath, and then Brangwyn, who realized that the room was rather full of emotion, made a suggestion that he would like to see the garden, and attaching himself to the rector, left Trevenna in the care of Rose. Den-

Twins

ham and the doctor went out together, and Rose, rising from her chair, glanced out of the window.

"Mr. Trevenna——"

He turned to her.

"Would you like to see the garden?"

"I should."

She paused by the door.

"Do you know, I always feel that Jack has been back here—in the spirit. And such a happy spirit; no horror——"

"You feel that?"

"I do."

Brangwyn, although he was a London consultant, knew something about roses, and while he and the rector were deep among the Hybrid Teas, Trevenna and Miss Denham walked up and down the tennis court. They were talking about Jack, and to Trevenna the face of his dead friend seemed to have become the face of the happy warrior with the blue eyes, for how could horror and ugliness attach themselves to anything in which Rose Denham was concerned?

"I am glad Brangwyn made me come here. I was rather afraid——"

"You must come again," she said, with her eyes on the distance.

"May I?"

"Yes."

When Brangwyn and Trevenna walked back to the White Hart the doctor felt that he had a very different man beside him, for the fear had gone out of Trevenna's eyes.

"I am glad you took me there, Brangwyn."

"A peaceful spot?"

"I ought to have known that Jack's people would be like that. Do you know—when his sister came into the room——"

"You were astonished?"

"Oh, more than that."

After dinner they sat under the lime tree in the White Hart garden smoking and talking, and it was eleven o'clock before they went to bed. Brangwyn was an early riser, but he found Trevenna up before

him, and wandering about the inn garden. He met Brangwyn with a smile.

"Did you sleep well, doctor?"

"I did. And you?"

"Splendidly."

"No dreams?"

"Yes, but not that dream. Perhaps it has gone. You remember what you said about a picture, Brangwyn?"

"To hang a new one in place of the old."

"Yes, that's it."

That Sunday morning Trevenna went to Beechbury Church, nor did Brangwyn see him for lunch, for Trevenna, waiting outside the porch, had been invited to lunch at the rectory. But he returned to the White Hart for tea and for the journey back to town. On the way home he showed a significant interest in Brangwyn's car.

"What's the make?"

"An 'Arcadia.'"

"A good name for a car. Does it cost much to run?"

"No. And she is very easy to handle. Garage and insurance are the biggest items."

"Rather pleasant to be able to get out of town."

"I agree with you, my dear chap," said the doctor.

A fortnight later Brangwyn heard that Trevenna had bought an "Arcadia." He came to tell the doctor about it and to suggest that Brangwyn should join him in a week-end pilgrimage.

"You can give me some tips, perhaps."

"I'll come with pleasure. Where do you think of going?"

Trevenna looked happily self-conscious.

"Oh, what about Beechbury? We could put up at the White Hart. Most pubs are such slovenly holes."

Brangwyn suppressed a smile.

"Yes, the White Hart is an exception. Well, let's settle on Beechbury."

They did.

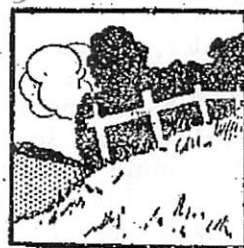
WARWICK DEEPING.

July 1923 Cassell's



THE CHILD AND THE MAN

By WARWICK DEEPING



25

HE sat each morning on the same chair and under the same palm tree in the gardens of Ville d'Or, a tall man with the head of a suffering Prometheus and eyes that were sad. Two sticks tipped with rubber rested against the chair. His thin legs had an air of not belonging to him.

Prosper Castlenau became a familiar figure in Ville d'Or. People called him "The man with the dead body and the burning eyes."

Sometimes he could be seen dragging himself along from the Clinique St. Jacques, leaning on those two sticks, and moving those stiff legs of his as though they were rusted in their sockets. His forehead was lined, but his mouth was gentle. He could smile, and those deep-set eyes of his seemed to watch life eagerly, with a sort of hunger.

But the gay people of Ville d'Or, who came to play in the sunshine, had not discovered the fact that Prosper Castlenau watched one particular woman.

This woman was tall and very fair, with eyes that looked as though they were trying to escape from some memory. She was a little feverish—her walk betrayed that—and Nature had not meant her to be feverish. She dressed with the exquisite taste of a Parisian of "le monde que s'amuse." There had been days when she had taken a chair next to Castlenau and talked to him, for she was the widow of his dead friend, Paul Viardot, who had been killed at Verdun.

Now she avoided Castlenau. She would pass without seeing him, and he was conscious of a subtle stiffening of her figure, an obstinate hardening of the blue eyes when she passed his chair. She resisted. Sometimes a man walked with her, and this man was the cause of her resistance.

"I would not make a friend of that man."

Those were the boldly quiet words that had broken the peace between them.

"Since when have you been my guardian?"

Hortense had been angry. A man should not trade impertinently on his affections. Castlenau had been her husband's friend, and she had behaved almost like a bourgeoisie in loving her husband.

Now Prosper Castlenau loved her. She knew it, though he had never hinted at such a thing.

"I'm done for," he had always said with elaborate and cheerful frankness. "I'm just a pair of eyes. I do nothing but watch."

But she was angry. What right had he to try and place himself between her and Felix Metier? What right had he to call up the ghost of Paul, her dead husband? She liked Metier. He was gay, audacious, witty, a man with compelling eyes and a strange sex fascination. She was fascinated by Felix Metier, though she had not confessed the fact fully even to herself.

If Prosper Castlenau watched Hortense, there was yet another woman who watched them both.

Pauline Countess Delamotte was as ugly as sin. That was what men had said of her in her youth, yet few women had been more deeply loved, and now that she was old her strange charm still held. She had eyes like a dark night, but the stars of the spirit of youth still flashed in them. She had wonderful insight and a wonderful tongue, and her "touch" was as sensitive as ever. Pauline had been a friend both to Castlenau and Hortense Viardot. She had seen the little tragedy develop, watched Prosper sitting there helpless, with the eyes of a

hunter, a man whose love could no longer pursue.

"What a fine head he has!" said the world; "and his eyes look as though they could draw everything to him."

They did not draw Hortense. She walked past him and let the brown glare of Felix Metier's passion play upon her face.

Pauline Delamotte began to take the chair that stood beside Castlenau's. He had no one to help him, no one who understood, and he made her think of a man tied to a stake. For three mornings Hortense and Metier went past them in the gardens, the man hugely triumphant, the woman a proud profile. Castlenau saw it all, and Pauline saw that he saw, and on the third morning she spoke.

"It is a pity."

Castlenau did not turn his head. He knew quite well what she meant, and that she was no mere officious old woman pulling love to bits with her claws, and yet his pride held out against her.

"So you are interested?"

"Life is always interesting. I am one of those who must always take sides—like you, my friend."

"I no longer take sides. That bit of shell in my spine spoilt me for cavalry charges. Three years ago I should have——"

He held himself in, his mouth a thing of iron.

"You would have galloped over that fellow. I'm not quite blind yet. It is a pity."

She sat and waited, feeling Castlenau's silence like a straining, cracking cord.

"That man is impossible," he said suddenly.

"You know him?"

"I knew him. He was in our Division. A blackguard, and worse than a blackguard. It's amazing!"

"That Hortense should be interested?"

"Viardot's wife! She was the sort of woman I thought of when I knelt in a church for five minutes before a battle."

Pauline Delamotte answered him very gently.

"Yes, my friend, you men with ideals sometimes place too heavy a burden

on our shoulders. There are days when we can carry them, but there are days when they crush us. A fellow like Metier expects a woman to carry nothing."

"But, good God, when Paul was killed——!"

"Yes, to be sure, she had loved him. And did she flinch? She carried her grief like a brave woman whose lips are as white as her heart. She was splendid. Where were you wounded?"

He looked at her curiously.

"In the spine. You know that."

"And where was Hortense's wound? Was it not in the heart?"

Castlenau's eyes gave a flash.

"Wait! You are letting the light in. What bigots we men are. I have almost forgotten how to walk, and Hortense——"

"She was hit in the heart. Do you know what that means? Sickness, nausea, a vision that is blurred. She does not see things clearly; her heart cries out for a tonic; her life staggers. Then a man like Metier comes along, a clever fellow with a soft tongue. Cads would lose so many triumphs, my friend, if they did not put on the appearance of a gentleman. Hortense's eyes are blurred."

Castlenau stared at the horizon.

"Well?" he asked fiercely.

"A man like Metier has to be stripped," she said. "I don't know whether it can be done. Perhaps, but not by us."

A week later little Yvonne, a child of four, joined her mother at the Hotel Venise. Yvonne had been staying with her grandmother in Paris, and her nurse had brought her to Ville d'Or. She was a fragile thing with big brown eyes, very sensitive, a child who ran to you at once after the first questioning glance, or shrank away.

Pauline Delamotte took Yvonne into her lap. Children were not frightened by her clever, ugly old face. And Hortense Viardot's eyes were blurred; something had come between her and Yvonne. Like Castlenau, the child conjured up ghosts.

"You must introduce me to Yvonne. We shall be great friends," said Metier.

"Presently," she said, with a vague look of pain. "Presently."

The real Hortense was still asleep.

but sometimes she stirred in her slumber.

Pauline Countess Delamotte was first in the field. If neither she nor Castlenau could wake Hortense, there were the eyes and voice of the child. She approached Hortense.

"Let me play grandmother. May I?"

Hortense seemed vague, absorbed.

"Why, yes, if you wish it."

"April and November walking out together. Thank you, my dear."

Pauline Delamotte took Yvonne for a walk. They looked at the shops, bought chocolates, and arrived in the gardens where Prosper Castlenau sat under his palm tree. The band was playing in the white kiosk, and for ten minutes old Pauline and young Yvonne listened to the band.

"I know a poor man who can only walk with two sticks. Isn't it sad, my dear?"

"Very sad," said Yvonne.

"He is a very lonely man, and has no one to play with him, and he has such kind eyes. He and your daddy used to play together as boys."

"Couldn't I play with him?" asked Yvonne.

"Shall we try and find the poor man?"

"Oh, yes." She jumped up.

They went.

Prosper and Yvonne were friends from the first glance. Her brown eyes looked into his blue ones, and the child in her held out her hands to the man in Castlenau. Yvonne had a heart that was quick to love and to pity. She could never be persuaded to pick flowers, and if she found a withered flower on the pavement she would take it home and give it water. A bird in a cage brought a soft frown to her face, and Castlenau was like a bird in a cage. True he was big and brown, with a deep voice and strong hands; but the child in Yvonne wanted to open the door.

Pauline Delamotte went shopping and left them together, the child leaning on the arm of Castlenau's chair and looking up into his face.

"You used to play with daddy?"

"A long, long time ago, Yvonne; but now, you see, I cannot play with anybody."

She examined his two sticks, her face very serious.

"I know lots of games," she said presently, "that you can play sitting still. I'll play them with you."

She dashed off in her little black velvet hat and her grey dress, her long brown legs very slim and straight, and Castlenau smiled. She was life to him, the very essence of youth, a bird, a butterfly, a flower, something that nestled close, a pair of innocent eyes, ungripping hands. She brought a chair beside him and sat close.

"We'll play at horses."

"How do we play it?"

"You see all the carriages and carts that pass? If it is a black horse it is mine; if it is a brown horse it is yours. Who gets most wins."

It was a close contest, but Castlenau won by two. He seemed delighted.

"I'm so glad you won," said Yvonne.

"Did you like the game?"

"It's a lovely game."

"I'll give you two kisses for your two horses, if you like."

Castlenau did like. His eyes looked big and strange and soft, and he touched the child with tender, reverent hands.

Pauline Delamotte returned and saw them kissing.

"So you haven't quarrelled?" she said.

"We shall never quarrel, shall we, Yvonne?"

"No, never. I'll play another game with you to-morrow."

"I shall love it," he said, looking queerly at Pauline.

The old lady and the child walked back to the Hotel Venise, and Yvonne would talk of nothing but Prosper Castlenau and his two sticks. How had it happened? Couldn't the doctors mend his poor legs for him? Wasn't it very lonely, having to sit there all day in a chair?

"I'll tell mother," she said. "Mother shall come and talk to him. But I don't want that other horrid man."

Pauline did not know that the child had seen Metier.

"What horrid man, chérie?"

"The man who comes to see mother."

"Ah, to be sure, Monsieur Felix Metier. But why do you not like him, Yvonne?"

"He shows his teeth, and his mouth is so red. I call him the Wolf Man. He looks at mother as though he would eat her."

"And Monsieur Castlenau is the dear, big dog."

In the gardens of the Hotel Venise Metier was sitting with Hortense. He had been invited to lunch, and he was making love to her like the Wolf Man of Yvonne's fancy. Pauline Delamotte and the child interrupted the affair. Metier liked neither of them, but he was very polite.

He bowed to Yvonne, yet there was an ironical something in Metier's attitude towards children. He talked down, patronized, even when his vanity wished to be playful, but he did not succeed with Yvonne.

"Mademoiselle has been buying chocolates!"

Yvonne held her distance, with solemn brown eyes that were cold and clouded.

"But they are not for you, monsieur."

"Oh, come now, not one for a poor fellow?"

"You are not a poor fellow, monsieur, and I think you are greedy."

Metier laughed, but not with pleasure. He withdrew a casual and coaxing hand. The two women were looking at Yvonne, for the child's dislike of Metier was as obvious as sunlight, a flower that is suddenly overshadowed. She did not shrink, but stood a little way off, looking up at the man with the ruthless, innocent, honest eyes of a child.

Hortense caught her breath. Pauline Delamotte was watching the mother.

"Yvonne, where are your manners?"

Yvonne remained staring at Felix Metier, quite unabashed, and with a curious obstinacy that trusted to some right instinct. It was Metier who showed up badly before the child. He was annoyed, restive, vaguely uncomfortable; the nonchalant man of the world failed in front of the child. It was as though some white light were playing upon him and showing up the dust on his soul.

"Yvonne!"

But Yvonne did not go to her mother; she turned to Pauline Dela-

motte and took a firm hold of the old woman's hand. Hortense's eyes were wide open. She had the look of a woman who had received a blow, swift, unexpected, a blow given in innocence and without anger.

Then she smiled.

"Go in to Marie, dear."

Pauline Delamotte took the child away, and Hortense remained standing, staring at a ghost.

Such was the birth of Pauline Delamotte's plot, the putting of a child against a clever, confident and dissipated man. She watched the affair develop, and arranged her scenes with an astuteness that hid a smile. Each morning she and Yvonne would go and sit with Prosper in the garden. He had moved to a quieter place, farther from the gay heart of Ville d'Or, and their chairs stood under a mimosa tree that smelt like heaven. The road was ten yards away, and over-arched by magnificent planes. A hedge of oleanders ran down the pathway to the road. On the other side the view lay open—the blue and purple and rose of flower beds in the stretch of vivid green.

Castlenau and the child now loved each other. There was an innocent and beautiful intimacy about their love that sent a glow through Pauline Delamotte's heart. They held hands, the child and the man, laughed into each other's eyes, looked deep and full into the clear water that is life.

Contrasts! Old Pauline was staging contrasts. The thing would happen; she knew that it must happen, and when it happened she kept still as a mouse. Hortense and Metier fell into the trap. They walked in upon the group one morning, stopped, stared. Castlenau did not see them. He was looking at Yvonne, who was tying a piece of blue ribbon round one of his sticks.

Then Hortense spoke. She wanted to walk on, but something held her there.

"Yvonne, come with us, dear."

There was a crudeness in the cry, a mother jealousy. Yvonne turned and looked at her, saw Metier, and went on tying that piece of ribbon to Castlenau's stick.

"We are playing a game," she said.

"Monsieur Prosper is going out to kill the dragon, and I'm making a magic sword."

Castlenau had raised his hat.

"Good morning. You don't mind two children playing together?"

She looked at him, and then her eyes fell. She was conscious of Metier beside her, of a shadow, of an influence, that this child of hers beat off with baby hands. Metier was cynical, amazed. She felt it. She realized that he could sneer, sneer at Yvonne, at Castlenau, at her. That group was there in the sunlight, and suddenly she wished to join it; but the presence of Metier held her back.

"I hope you are better," she said lamely.

He smiled.

"As far as life goes, yes. Yvonne has been mending me. Do you mind?"

"No," she said. "Oh, no."

She swept on with Metier. He laughed, and his laughter roused a sudden fierceness in her.

"What is there to laugh at?"

"That baby intrigue, and old Delamotte playing chaperon."

"Mon Dieu!" she said.

She saw him as a beast. He had hurt, disgusted her, but she did not tell him so just then.

Pauline Delamotte had set nature against nature, yet the inevitableness of the crisis was hastened by coincidences which she had not foreseen and over which she had no control. Nor would Castlenau have guessed that his

curve of life would touch the curve of a person named Lazare, and in a moment that should be tragic to them both. Lazare was a cabman in Ville d'Or, an evil beast with the eyes of a devil, a ridiculous creature in his way, who had a reputation in his own clique. Lazare had a horse called

Satan, a horse with a big white-edged eye and a temper as evil as Lazare's. Master and beast were always fighting, but it was Lazare's boast that he always had the whip hand of his



"Yvonne, come with us, dear"

horse. It is possible they had a sort of affection for each other, a savage zest in their quarrels.

One evening they had a set-to outside the Hotel de Louvre. Lazare thrashed Satan, and Satan ran away. He bumped one wheel off the carriage against the kerb, and rolled Lazare out of his seat. Then Satan went for a gallop. He had beaten Lazare this time.

There were few people about, and they left Satan alone as he rioted down towards Ville d'Or. The gardens were nearly empty, and under his mimosa tree Prosper Castlenau sat reading a book. Fifty yards away, and on the other side of the road, Hortense, Metier and Yvonne were walking back from the town.

Then Yvonne sighted Castlenau.

"Look! Monsieur Prosper, all alone."

Hortense let her go, and Yvonne ran on along the path and out into the road just as Satan came trailing his triumphant chariot round the corner.

Quite still in the middle of the road Yvonne stood, with astonishment in her eyes and with a helplessness that was hardly fear. There were voices that called to her, but she did not seem to hear them and she did not move.

It was like the flash of a cinema picture, three people and their contrasted impulses caught in the broad daylight. Hortense had started to run, but Metier had seized her by the wrist; they were struggling together, while Castlenau rose on his two sticks, a figure that lifted itself and moved with a sense of immense effort, a corpse that walked, an inspired face straining towards and attaining the impossible. He staggered down the path, flopped into the road, caught Yvonne and seemed to pull her behind him. Satan swerved to the left, but the shaft struck Castlenau a glancing blow and sent him sprawling.

Then the clockwork seemed to run down; all the figures ceased to move. Satan had pulled himself up and stood shaking, with Metier holding his head. Hortense was kneeling on the stones beside Prosper Castlenau, while little Yvonne stood and stared with childish wonder at them both.

"Oh, my friend, you are hurt?"

Castlenau smiled at her.

"Nothing much. I twisted my back a bit. Besides, it does not matter. I was broken before, you know."

People began to arrive, running—a policeman, three men, two women. A cab clattered up and stopped. Metier surrendered Satan to one of the men, glanced at the group in the roadway, and walked off. He was out of the picture, and he knew it.

They lifted Castlenau into the cab, and he was driven to the Clinique St. Jacques. Hortense sat beside him, supporting him with one arm and holding Yvonne in her lap. Her eyes seemed full of the tragedy; she could not speak.

Hortense Viardot and Pauline Delamotte drove together to the Clinique St. Jacques. A week had passed since the accident, and the two women had expected Castlenau to die. It did not seem possible for that crippled body of his to survive a second disaster; yet Castlenau did not die.

He had seen Yvonne each day. She had been allowed to sit on his bed and talk to him, and in Yvonne's eyes he was her own transcendent hero.

He had a smile that was incredulous, amused, astonished. Felix Metier had disappeared from Ville d'Or, but Felix Metier had left no shadow.

The doctor received Hortense and Pauline that morning in his private room.

"I assure you, madame, I can hardly believe it. You see, we all thought that the accident would finish him. It hasn't."

Hortense's eyes reminded Pauline Delamotte of the eyes of Yvonne.

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

The doctor walked up and down, smiling, jerking his coat-tails, immensely amused at himself.

"Tiens! But some people would call it a miracle. A miracle! But that tumble of his must have broken some adhesions, freed the spinal cord."

"Monsieur," said Hortense's voice very quietly, "will you tell me quickly what you mean?"

The doctor twirled and faced her.

"It seems that he is going to get well, and that he is going to regain the use of his legs."

Hortense stood up. She was very pale. She went and kissed Pauline Delamotte.

"Monsieur, I must see him."

"Why, certainly," said the doctor. "He is in great spirits. He has been showing me how he can move his toes. Just like a baby, you know."

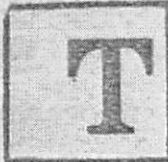
When Hortense Viardot came out of Castlenau's room her eyes showed that she had been weeping.

Uncle Gee Wizz

By Warwick Deeping

26

"He puzzled her. He sat there like a demure but secretly smiling boy whose hair had gone grey. He was not according to plan, and he did not ask her to lunch. He was polite and pleasant, and his whole attitude contradicted the exuberance of that first embrace."



THE family name suggested irony.

Treasure. Thomas Mallord Treasure. Also, the treasury contained so many precious articles: Irene and Ishtar, and Bob and Oliver, and three small things who were called "the etceteras."

Thomas, the originator of the hoard, a big, absent-minded creature with a tawny beard, was a landscape painter. He had a private income of some three-hundred pounds a year, and the habit of wiping his paint brushes on his trousers. He was a colourful soul, impossibly serene and feckless, and the husband of a wife whose Christian name was Helen. She had not caused the towers of Troy to fall, but in their young days Tom had painted her as Imogen and Guinevere with all her cloud of gold displayed.

It was grey now, and Thomas was grizzled. They were family people, more so even than they knew, the parents of seven children, seven strenuous children, a veritable candlestick of gold. The young Treasures had the irreverence of the ambitious. Their various attitudes suggested that Thomas and Helen were people who had fallen asleep and needed to be roused.

Bob had expressed the discontents of the seven young tyrants.

"Wherever two or three treasures are gathered together you won't find three halfpennies."

Which—in a sense—was true, though Bob was at Barts, and Oliver a scholar of "Christs," and Irene was learning

the duties of a secretary, and Ishtar—aged fifteen—scribbled short stories. It had been managed somehow, but the four elder tyrants considered that it might have been managed better.

Their father had not visited his tailor for five long years. He wore grey flannel trousers, baggy and paint-stained. One pair was in the wash, or being treated by Helen with benzine, while the other pair sat with Thomas at his work.

The family considered that Thomas did not either paint or sell a sufficient number of pictures.

"Say, peoples, the pater hasn't had a private show—since when—?"

Sitting in conclave in the summer-house of the cottage, the family decided that it was time that Thomas exerted himself. Undoubtedly Helen's babies had been very badly spoilt. They scolded and coerced their parents like greedy young fledglings. The whole of Hurst laughed or was scandalised when the menage at Crome Cottage was under discussion.

"Pater, we've decided that it's time you had a show in town, a one-man show."

Said the superior Irene:

"Nothing else is adequate in these days. The Grainger Galleries."

They might have added—in chorus: "We can't have you being referred to as 'a back number.' You may be an R.A.—but that may be considered shameful. We Treasures are debonair. It is a question of atmosphere."

Thomas looked sleepy and amused.

"Who's going to pay for the Grainger Galleries?"

That—most certainly—was a poser, but the family would not be posed.

"You ought to regard it as a

Uncle Gee Wizz

speculation, pater. To put it vulgarly——"

But Thomas refused to hire the Grainger Galleries. He was a rather tired man. Possibly he had begun to look forward to the day when the seven Treasures should be scattered. But the day seemed very distant.

II

It was one of T. T.'s sayings that "all art is emotion," but when that amazing letter arrived from the United States of America, T. T. showed no emotion. He just smiled into his beard.

The facts were as follows. Years ago Helen had a brother, one Gerald George Wise. He had disappeared adventurously, and not wholly creditably, across the Atlantic, and not till this particular Saturday in April did Helen discover that she still had a brother. He wrote from Detroit. "Mr. Gerald G. Wise" was printed at the top of the page.

All the various Treasures happened to be at home that week-end. Oliver was down from Cambridge; Bob had deserted Barts; Irene condescended to accept board-and-lodging when convenient to herself.

There was uproar round the breakfast-table over that letter. Helen had passed it to Thomas, and when the amazing contents were realised, the family demanded admission.

Irene, stretching out a hand, purloined it from beside her father's plate.

"People, it's musical comedy!"

"A Nunc from Detroit!"

"A Dollar King!"

"Say—suppose he stinks of it! Read it out, read it out!"

Said Helen: "Irene, it's my letter——" but Irene just glanced at her mother. "Don't worry, old thing," and she read.

"Dear Sis——" and there was applause—"Here's the prodigal putting pen to paper after all these years. Some gap in the history, isn't there? I'm coming across to the old country in June, my dear, and I think

you are about the only crowd I want to see. I 'arrived' here some time during the War. Lone bachelor, or, rather, widower. Maybe I shall circulate round the earth, shedding dollar notes. Suppose you can put me up for a month? I want to see you and Tom. Tom was about the only Englishman who didn't look down his nose at me when I fell down that time."

There was more. Americans are sociable and expansive, and the Treasure breakfast-table was vocal.

"Attah boy——!"

"Gerald G. Wise! I say—a live wire!"

"Gee Wizz!"

"Gosh! That's it. Uncle Gee Wizz! Say, pater, what had Uncle G. done when you didn't look down your nose?"

"Pater's nose is crooked!"

T. T. reached for the marmalade and found that the family had left him about half-a-spoonful. He had a thoughtful air; he was an affectionate and tolerant creature, but there were times when the family was rather intolerable. *Gaillard* youth! He and Helen had—he supposed—been much too easy.

He said, in his slow, pleasant, bumble-bee voice: "Wise was a bit of a rebel, that's all."

Helen, behind her tea-tray, looked a little bothered and out of temper.

"My letter, Irene——"

Irene stared. It was unusual for Helen to speak sharply.

"All right, mater."

Helen's hand insisted.

"Thank you."

After breakfast the tyranny transferred itself to the garden house, Bob and Oliver having filled their pipes from their father's tobacco-jar in the studio. They sat in conclave. They dissected the situation. With characteristic flippancy they discussed Uncle Gee Wizz and his sensational resurrection, and his possibilities and his impossibilities. Their idea of America and the Americans was very English, and young English at that.

"Suppose he chews gum?"

"And talks about suspenders!"

"Oh, he'll talk some. But, say, Buddy, if he carries a wad of notes, and gets a mush on us——?"

Undoubtedly the young Treasures realised that Uncle Gee Wizz might have distinct possibilities, though each hid a secret thought from the others. Capital was short in the Treasure family, and without capital where are you in these highly competitive days? Irene had ideas of her own, which only needed financing; Oliver's notion was to buy himself a partnership in a good "prep" school; Bob wanted a car for his week-ends and his young women. It is possible that each of them dreamed of their mother's brother as one who, if skilfully handled, might become a kind of universal provider. Did he not say that he had "arrived"?

They hid these personal reflections, but they did agree in supposing that Uncle Gee Wizz ought to be impressed. Weren't all Americans pragmatists? They respected size, success, the big wallop. And T. T. might be a Royal Academician, and a passable landscape painter, but he had no wallop.

Said Irene: "We've got to keep our end up with this fellow, uncle or no uncle. No poor-relation stunt. The pater must have that private show."

"Timed for the G. W.'s arrival?"

"Of course. It will impress him. The pater must be made to take the Grainger Gallery."

"Good biz," said the medical student. "Supposing we put it to him. If he did nothing else—the Nunc might buy some pictures."

Mercenary young people, but frankly aware of the value of money, and of the inconveniences which appear to follow the lack of it. They belonged to a generation a portion of which expects to stand upon the parental shoulders and to leap off from there. T. T. had big shoulders, but he had always been so casual about money, and perhaps because of this very casualness life had presented him ironically with these hard young things.

The four agreed to approach their mother. It was a family opinion that Helen was the parent in authority,

and that if anything had to be done, their mother would do it. T. T. would always be so full of indolent smiles, while sucking his brushes like a great big, bearded baby.

Irene opened the attack. Helen was dealing with the underclothing of the three younger Treasures.

"We do think, mater, that T. T. ought to arrange for a private show."

"Oh," said Helen, with a queer little glance at her eldest daughter.

"Yes; you see—he hasn't done much lately, has he? And wouldn't it be good for Uncle G. W.?"

The mother of all the Treasures appeared to bend her head over her work. Irene did notice that her mother looked a little flushed.

"You think it would impress your uncle?"

"Well—wouldn't it? The pater may be an R.A., and all that, but we are a bit—dusty, aren't we?"

Helen Treasure hesitated. She exerted self-control, and that which she said differed from the original and suppressed retort.

"You young things are a little bit patronising, aren't you? Ask your father. He decides these questions."

It is probable that the daughter never divined the mother's anger, for—if there was a man among men, T. T. was that man. Big, tolerant, smiling, somewhat absent-minded, and rather inarticulate save with his brush, he was one of those singular creatures who lack personal guile. He was too given to seeing the other person's point of view. He was too unselfish.

Helen spoke to Thomas.

"We have been making a great mistake, Tom. We have been too easy. If you agree with me—I have made up my mind that the three young ones shall be treated differently."

He stood looking down at her with eyes of affection.

"Patronising young beggars—aren't they! I suppose they think I'm a sleepy old dog. I—do—agree. We have gone in too much for the cult of the child, free self-expression and all that."

Said Helen: "Seems to me—

Uncle Gee Wizz

selfishness is the sin. We have made these four selfish. I shall try a little Victorianism on the young ones. But—Tom——”

“You want me to come into line?”

“Please.”

“All right.”

He smiled into his beard.

“Sir Oliver has been hinting that I ought to advertise myself! Say, dear thing, don't you think I ought to buy a new pair of trousers before George arrives?”

She glanced consentingly at his trousers.

“No. If my brother can't see beyond a pair of trousers, let him remain blind.”

T. T. bent down and kissed her.

“It's always been amazing—the way you have put up with this funny, old fellow.”

“Because I have always liked him that way. Oh, my dear, you've never been a prig to me.”

III

In June Uncle Gee Wizz arrived on the *Ruritania*. The Grainger Galleries were occupied by other artists; T. T. was painting the Hartling beeches five miles from Hurst, riding to and fro on his bicycle. Helen was busy with domesticities, and with exercising a new Victorianism upon the three lesser Treasures. Mr. Gerald G. Wise took a suite at the “Savoy” and sent off a reply-paid telegram to his sister.

Said Helen to Thomas: “George wants us to go up and lunch at the Savoy—before he comes down here.”

“All of us?”

“No, just you and I.”

Said Thomas: “What about my clothes? Have I any?”

“The brown lounge suit. It's quite good.”

“Then we'll go.”

But interested eyes in London and Cambridge had been watching the social items in the papers. It was possible that Uncle Gee Wizz had sufficient wallop to get it registered upon the press, and Uncle Gee Wizz had that wallop. Irene and Oliver and

Bob all read that Mr. Gerald G. Wise had arrived in London, and was staying at the Savoy. Ishtar heard the news from her parents, and, being informed that she was to be left at Hurst, wrote three sulky pages of a short story upon the purblindness of parents.

Mr. Wise's telephone rang. He was sitting in an arm-chair facing the big window overlooking the Thames. London was more and more London after all these years.

“Hallo?”

“Lady wanting to see you, sir.”

“What name?”

“Treasure, sir, Miss Irene Treasure.”

“Send her up.”

It was Irene who received the surprise. She was a tall young woman with a presence, who extended towards the world a hand of intelligent tolerance. In the creating of an impression she was both more and less than herself. She walked into Mr. G. G.'s room, expecting to meet an elderly, ponderous and dough-faced citizen who would say: “Wa'll, my dear, so this is Irene. I'm tickled to death.” But a very boyish-looking person, with blue eyes and grey hair that had a youthful crispness, held out two hands.

“One of Helen's babies?”

“Yes. Uncle Gerald—I presume?”

She was aware of a queer, humorous blinking of those blue eyes, and then she was embraced and kissed with a kind of *gaillard* mischievousness. She was put off her pedestal for the moment. She was not pleased, especially when this rather puckish person patted her cheek. She resumed her distance and her drawl.

“Well, how do you find London?”

Her uncle appeared to give a little jerk of the head as though he had tweaked himself rallyingly by the collar. He offered cigarettes.

“It's still here. Peculiar—but true. I guess you're Irene?”

She nodded, accepted a cigarette, sat down and observed him.

“Yes, I'm Irene. I have got a job in town. Did you have a good passage?”

“A superlative passage. No icebergs.”

"Ah—no icebergs."

"And the cold storage was superb."

He puzzled her. He sat there like a demure but secretly smiling boy whose hair had gone grey. He was not according to plan, and he did not ask her to lunch. He was polite and pleasant, and his whole attitude contradicted the exuberance of that first embrace.

"Well, au revoir, Uncle Gerald. I hope we shall see some more of you."

"As much as is here," and courteously he walked with her to the lift and smiled her into it.

Later, Mr. Robert Treasure arrived with his air of pallid strenuousness and a pair of disillusioned eyes. He observed the American as though he were studying a bottled specimen, and after trying to be youthfully genial, became puzzled and chilly. Mr. Gerald G. Wise placed upon him an explosive cigar, but did not trouble to see him to the lift. He picked up the telephone and rang up an inquiry clerk.

"Hallo!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Mr. Gerald G. Wise speaking. If any more young visitors arrive—tell 'em I'm out."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm not seeing anyone under fifty. Got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Make a note of it."

So that when Oliver—"Sir Oliver," as his father called him—hurried up from Cambridge, the wild man from Detroit was invisible, and Oliver went back by the six o'clock train without attempting to confer with Robert or Irene.

But over the prospects and the possibilities of the succeeding day Mr. Gerald G. Wise rubbed hopeful hands. He ordered a lunch for three, a rather exquisite lunch. He ordered roses, and then sat down to wait. He had the air of a man sitting tenderly and carefully upon cherished illusions. He listened for the telephone bell.

It rang.

"Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Treasure, sir."

"Ask them to come up."

He stood in the middle of the room and waited. The door was opened by a valet. He saw two figures; what were to him two old-world figures; Helen with her gentle and sunny face, old Tom in his brown suit, bearded, with that wise, slow smile.

"Oh, Sis——"

"George, my dear!"

They fell upon each other, and, to Tom, G. G. extended a quick hand.

"Tom, you old beggar!"

They gripped.

"I'm glad—haven't been so glad—for a long while."

Mr. Wise had a thickness of the voice.

"Gee Wizz!—same old England, same old Tom and Helen. I wondered—Great stuff!—Gee!—I'm frizzled!"

IV

NEXT day the cottage at Hurst welcomed G. G. Wise. He had said to his sister: "Look here, old girl, don't make any fuss of me—but if you can put me in a quiet corner . . . And I'd rather prefer—if it could be managed—to spend the first few days with you and Tom." He said nothing about the visits of Bob and Oliver and Irene. Ishtar, much to her disgust, was sent to sleep out with two of the smaller Treasures in order that G. G. might not be crowded. She was a little haughty about it.

But Ishtar was quite engaging to Uncle G. in his presence. She guessed his age to be forty, and pretended to be incredulous when he assured her he was five-and-fifty. But he seemed to prefer the three younger Treasures to Ishtar; they were more spontaneous.

On the first evening Helen led him into the summer-house, and he lay in a long chair and looked at Helen's roses and the funny old cottage and its garden. He had an air of great contentment.

"Say, where's old Tom?"

"He has a little work to do. He thought that you and I might want to talk."

Uncle Gee Wizz

"Great man, Thomas."

"He has always made me very happy, G."

"Same old G."

She looked at him with eyes of reproach and affection.

"Why didn't you let us know? I used to wonder."

He smiled.

"Oh, I had peeps at you, Sis—which you never knew about."

"Peeps?"

"I hired someone about here to send me the news of you four times a year."

"G! You didn't!"

"I did. I had photos of you all: a reg'lar picture-gallery. You didn't know me, but I knew you."

"Who was it who wrote to you?"

"Shan't tell."

"Was it Tom?"

"No, it wasn't Tom."

Helen's hands were busy upon those interminable mendings that the Treasure household necessitated, and G. G. observed her as he might have observed Joan of Arc.

"Why did you let twenty years go by, George?"

"I wasn't coming back to the old country, my dear, until I had my feet on the floor. Remember—how I disappeared——?"

"Oh, George—of course that's all forgotten."

"Is it? Not by me. I've come back to settle with old Tom."

"What about?"

"Tom gave me a hundred pounds—about all he had saved."

"Tom did?"

"Yes; I suppose he never told you?"

"No."

"Just like old Tom."

"Yes, just like Tom."

G. G. was smiling.

"A hundred pounds might be useful, Sis? All these young things. Then—there will be twenty years' interest."

"You mustn't, G. But perhaps—just the hundred. Tom's been so unselfish."

"You haven't calculated the interest, Sis?"

"No."

"Well—I shall have to do that."

Metaphorically, Uncle Gee Wizz put his feet up and made himself thoroughly comfortable.

Meanwhile, the rest of the family—or, rather, the four elder Treasures—were interested at a distance. Ishtar kept them informed.

Ishtar did not think that Uncle G. could be as rich as they had imagined. He wore shabby old clothes.

G. G. and T. T. were always about together. In fact—they appeared inseparable.

G. G. had produced a colour box and was dabbling in water-colour, and he didn't dabble so badly, either.

G. G. had bought a motor-car, only a little car, and second-hand at that. It was garaged at the "George." G. G. and T. T. were trundling all over the place in it, daubing and loafing, and sometimes the mater went with them. They took a picnic basket.

"My birthday. Uncle G. G. gave me ten shillings. I think he might have made it a pound."

Sir Oliver, proposing to come down from Cambridge about that time, was told that there was no room in the cottage, but that he could go to Germany for a month. Oliver had always been prating of his passion for Germany, and how other fellows had more luck in the Long Vac. than he had. His father sent him a cheque and a benediction: "Now, my lad, you can do what you have always wished to do."

Oliver looked dubiously at the cheque, and, dropping in on Irene at her hostel, compared views and impressions.

"I should like to know what the situation is."

"They seem jolly funny about it," said the daughter; "keeping him in cold storage. I was going down last week-end, and the mater wrote to say I couldn't."

"Pretty cool—that! They are packing me off to Germany."

"You heard he'd bought a second-hand car?"

"Yes; cost him about thirty quid, I

By Warwick Deeping

suppose. That Savoy business must have been a bit of bluff. Yankee swank. I don't believe he's a gold-bug."

"He's just sponging on T. T. The pater's so facile."

There came a day when T. T. and G. G. returned from an expedition in "Moses" looking grave and silent and distraught. Helen observed them all through dinner. She said nothing until they were settled in the garden with coffee and their pipes under the lime-tree above the lawn, and then she called them to account.

"I do believe you two have been quarrelling."

T. T. stroked his beard. G. G. looked at his shoes.

"No, not quarrelling—just a difference of opinion. Tom's not a business man, God bless him! It's about that loan—twenty or more years ago."

"It wasn't a loan," said Tom. "I gave it."

"It wasn't a gift. I borrowed it."

"Nonsense, my dear chap——"

Helen held up a knitting-needle.

"All this about a hundred pounds!"

G. G. smiled.

"It's not the capital, my dear, but the interest. Tom won't see——"

"Well, you tell her. It's absurd."

Said G. G. making a gesture with his pipe: "I've always calculated, Sis, that that loan was worth a thousand per cent. to me. That's so. Not a cent. less. Now a thousand per cent. on a hundred pounds—for twenty years——"

"It's nonsense——"

"Tom, be quiet!" said his wife.

"So—Sis—I reckon that I owe Tom twenty-thousand pounds. I poked the cheque at him to-day—and he lit his pipe with it. A cheque costs twopence. He'll owe me twopence. Perhaps you have two pennies on you, my dear."

They continued hotly and generously to argue until G. G. stood up, and, marching up and down, delivered himself of his last period.

"I never touched that hundred

pounds. I just added a little and added a little until my chance came, and then I sailed in and captured the city. But I shouldn't have done it—perhaps—but for that hundred pounds—and, what was more—but for the spirit in which it was passed to me. To-day—I'm worth half a million. When I say I owe Tom twenty-thousand pounds—I say I owe him a damned sight more—as man to man. Now, look here, Sis, I'm willing to let you decide—if Tom is willing."

Helen looked just a little anxiously at her husband. She knew that she was hugely moved and thrilled, and that she wanted the money for Tom and for other things.

"What do you say, Tom?"

T. T. cuddled the bowl of his pipe in one of his big hands.

"All right. But——"

"No buts, my son. Now then, Helen——"

Helen looked at the wool-work on her knees.

"I think Tom ought to accept the money."

G. G. rushed up and kissed her.

"Gee Wizz!—you're great, both of you! There's only one proviso. I want you to spend the money on your two selves, not on all those darned kids. Let 'em scratch for themselves. Now, don't look shocked, my dear. You and Tom can fly off to Italy or Egypt this winter. Maybe I'll come with you. Anyway, I'm thinking of buying a little place in the old country, and while you're away I'll keep an eye—two eyes—on Miss Irene and Masters Bob and Oliver."

He did. Moreover, to the four young tyrants he always appeared to be over-emphasising his points.

"T. T.'s a great man. It's—my—opinion—that he's not far behind Cotman and Constable."

The young Treasures thought him a rather boring and over-emphatic person. They did not think that he had a sense of humour. But he had a wallop, so they kept quiet. In some ways he was very much Uncle Gee Wizz.

WARWICK DEEPING

VOLUME FOUR

PART - TWO

The Quiver

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The Rejuvenation of Raxby

by
**WARWICK
DEEPING**

SHE was a colonial, and in appearance she represented the sentimental man's idea of "Carmen," something very dark and tall and mysterious and passionate, with a red mouth and midnight eyes. The puzzling part of it was that she was the very antithesis of what she looked; but how was the ordinary sentimental man to know that? When she entered a room everyone looked at her. It was as though the curtain had been rung up and the play was about to begin.

She had married an Englishman, the particular sort of Englishman whom everybody is supposed to laugh at, even a curate. Their marriage was preposterous, at least people said it was preposterous, for they judged by appearances, and their judgment was out of date. Faith Pemberton was modern. She was direct, and her directness bewildered more circuitous mortals.

"Faith! Fancy calling a woman like that Faith!"

"Well, my dear, the alternatives are Hope and Charity!"

"Don't be ridiculous, John."

The baronet smiled. To be Sir John Toke of Tokenhouse Hall, and the husband of Lady Serena Toke, made it quite impossible for him to be ridiculous. Lady Serena was never ridiculous. She was made of hard paste and she was translucent.

Raxby was puzzled. So was the Rev. Horatio Dunsterby, its rector. When Mrs. Irene Dunsterby took the matter up with him across the breakfast table, he found that it was useless to hide behind the *Morning Post*, for though her parents had christened Mrs. Dunsterby "Irene," she had

been red and determined in her cradle, and she had remained red and determined ever since.

"You imply, my dear," said the rector, "that before engaging a new curate I should have interviewed his wife! I did

not even know that he had a wife."

"One should think of these things."

Dunsterby regarded her with mild toleration. He had been born with a sense of humour, and necessity—Mrs. Dunsterby and Raxby—had developed it.

"The man is a gentleman."

"I have no fault to find with Pemberton."

Mrs. Dunsterby always referred to her curates as she would have referred to the gardener or the groom.

"Quite so. He is the very sort of man I have been looking for, someone to manage the boys and young men."

He smiled. His smile said: "I—can manage the women,"—which was true.

His wife poured herself out a second cup of tea.

"Muscular Christianity, Horace——"

"English, my dear, English. And not a bad form of Christianity—either. After all—we—are English; Raxby is English. You have to get at an Englishman with a cricket bat or a race-horse. Pemberton is just a big boy."

His wife looked severe.

"I like Pemberton," she said. "He certainly seems to have got hold of the rougher element. But his sermons——"

"His sermons don't matter. What did matter was when he made eighty-three not out against Tidworth and broke two of The George windows. We hadn't beaten Tidworth for ten years. That was three weeks

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ago, and he had been with us just one week. Ever since then he has had Raxby in his pocket."

"Flannelled fools!" said the lady.

"Thank God for it," thought her husband.

Meanwhile a young woman looked out of a window in a compressed red house in Raxby High Street. It was a first-floor window, and across her knees lay some amber-coloured material which she was turning into a dress, one of those dresses that had shocked the dowdy self-complacency of Raxby and sent a thrill of youth through various middle-aged gentlemen.

"Mercy! But it is dull here!" she thought.

She smiled, and it was quite a happy smile. Her hands rested upon the folds of the sunlit stuff upon her lap.

"Religious? Well, I guess so," she meditated. "I can't say that I'm an expert on the Athanasian Creed. But I have got a religion, and I suppose—he—is my religion. Making things a bit more pleasant and clean and wholesome by being what he is."

She went on with her sewing. Presently she raised her eyes to the house across the way. She saw an oblong of mottled stucco with two windows in it, one above the other, the upper window decorated with white lace curtains and an aspidistra, the lower showing another aspidistra and more white lace curtains, also a little iron railing painted a chocolate red. Below was the shop, Gutteridge's Boot Store, two curved windows with a glass door between. On holidays and Sundays the shop windows were screened with shabby white canvas. Sometimes you saw Mr. Gutteridge like a sandy-coloured ferret poking its head to and fro in the shadow of a rabbit hole. The International Stores, swollen and prosperous, bore heavily on Gutteridge's right; Mill's ironmongery shop compressed him on the left. The boot store looked melancholy and mean.

"I must get him out of this," was the reflection of the woman at the window.

She nodded her head.

"He's too big for it. No ambition but to be what he is. Quite right too—for him. I know. But what about the others? He's too big for them. Abraham Lincoln in Kittle-cattle Alley! I have got to cut the rope and set him sailing the big sea where he will be what he ought to be, a

man's ship-master. Men! That's it. He's made for men. But how? How am I to do it?"

Her eyes lit up and she leaned slightly forward. He had come down the street and had stopped to talk to a couple of lads outside Mr. Gutteridge's shop. He had serious grey eyes, a square jaw, good teeth. Women were apt to be foolish about him, but he never saw it. He was like a big, clean boy just out of some happy, strenuous home, without guile, supremely in earnest, hitting out at life as he hit at a ball.

"You dear!" she said to herself, and smiled. "I wonder why you always make me think of a Newfoundland puppy? I love you, just that. And there is gooseberry tart for lunch—with cream!"

He looked up and saw her. He smiled. Two years ago he had thought her the most wonderful thing in the world, and somehow he continued to think it. It made her what she was, and not what she seemed to other people, nor had he ever seen what other men—and women—thought they saw in her. Raw, perilous, perplexing sex! He had taken her and loved her as he took and loved his work. She may have been raw, but her rawness had ripened into a rich happiness of mind and body.

She heard him on the stairs.

"Well, if Raxby does not make him jealous," she reflected, "then—Not that I want him jealous. He's used to me. Raxby isn't."

She tossed the half-made dress on to a chair and opened the door.

"Hallo, St. Andrew!"

He kissed her as though he liked kissing her.

"I'm jolly hungry, girl. I had to ride over to Tokenhouse. Dear old Serena is in trouble about the fête."

"So you call her 'dear,' you wicked babe! And what is the trouble?"

"She was going to have a lady palmist or something, and the woman can't come. I told her that you are an absolute 'pro' at palmistry."

"You did! And what did she say?"

"Say? I've forgotten. I think she said you looked psychic."

Faith laughed.

"Are you sure it wasn't 'She looks like it'? Dear Lady Serena! Andie, there's gooseberry tart for lunch."

"Oh, great!" he said.

She thought and was ready to swear that he was the most wholesome and unclerical



"He sat down and listened with a rapt smile while she told his hand"—p. 434

Drawn by
C. Morse

THE QUIVER

thing in the Empire. Mrs. Dunsterby had said that he could not preach. "He stands up and has a sort of gossip with you." Which was true, but the oratory which sent Raxby home with a smooth appetite to its Sunday dinner was not the stuff that moved men. Faith believed that her man was a great mover of men. He talked to them as though they were all playing the greatest game in the world, and he was never a prig at games.

"London," she was always saying to herself, "London, somehow—for you."

Faith went to the fête at Tokenhouse Hall and sat in a little classic summer-house and examined people's palms. She was wearing that amber-coloured dress and a broad-brimmed hat, and her meeting with Lady Serena Toke had been a very polite and frigid affair.

"You, your hat, your dress and your 'atmosphere' are all quite preposterous."

My Lady's pale eyes had said that to her in the middle of the Tokenhouse lawn.

Later Lady Serena said it aloud to Mrs. Dunsterby.

"Quite preposterous."

The rectoress appeared to think that she—personally—was being held responsible.

"I agree. But how were we to know? Pemberton is quite an ordinary young man. We expected that if he had a wife she would be an ordinary young woman."

Her Ladyship scrutinized the crowd.

"That dress, my dear! She ought not to be able to dress like that."

"What have you done with her?"

"Put her in the summer-house. She'll be kept there, telling people a lot of nonsense. I think she looks the part."

It happened otherwise; it was bound to happen otherwise in spite of all the Lady Serenas and Irene Dunsterbys. Somehow, Sir John Toke got into the summer-house, running the blockade of waiting girls and matrons. He chose to assume that Mrs. Pemberton was being overworked, and he assumed that she had had no tea.

"Oh, I can go on for hours," she laughed; "but I must earn another sixpence."

"From me?"

"Of course."

He was delighted. He sat down and listened with a rapt smile while she told his hand. After all, it was much pleasanter and more stimulating than talking to Mrs. Dunsterby or watching to see that the children did not fall out of the swings. Pem-

berton was attending to that; he was attending to everything—the races, the coco-nut shies, the cricket match. Excellent chap, Pemberton! And his wife was really a most charming young person. Sir John insisted on taking her to have some tea. She was a very noticeable woman, and what man of sense does not like to be seen in possession of a noticeable woman?

They were noticed.

"I say—who's that with Toke?"

"You mean the girl in yellow?"

"Rather. Looks like a Spanish gipsy."

"That's our curate's wife."

The interested person looked slyly sceptical.

"My dear chap, tell me another!"

"It's a fact."

"But she couldn't be!"

"She is."

Faith's tea and Sir John's flirtation were both curtailed by the sailing in of Lady Serena.

"Mrs. Pemberton, I don't want to fuss you, but there is quite a crowd waiting by the summer-house."

Faith surrendered her cup to Sir John.

"I'll go at once."

"John," said the lady, intercepting his obvious impulse, "will you go and look after the twopenny dip while Miss Plimsol has tea."

"Certainly, certainly," said Sir John, and he went.

Mrs. Pemberton was kept examining moist palms until nearly seven o'clock, and the really disgraceful thing about it was the absurd interest shown in their life lines by a number of middle-aged gentlemen. Howard Smythe, Esq., was the first to follow Sir John Toke's lead. Emerging, he met Toby Sangster, Esq., with his carnation and his eyeglass. Mr. Sangster was displaced by Sir Basil Templeman, and hard on the heels of Sir Basil followed the brothers Gudgeon. The Gudgeons were merry bachelors of fifty who dressed exactly alike and looked like twins. Algernon listened while Percival's character was delineated, and Percival did the same for Algernon.

"Top hole, Mrs. Pemberton. You got my brother to the life."

"Same with Algernon."

"Couldn't we have—what shall we call it?—a second helping?"

She laughed.

"You greedy men! Perhaps, when everybody else is satisfied!"

THE REJUVENATION OF RAXBY

Her last client was the rector, and she gave him the best character of them all, not only because he deserved it, but because she thought it rather brave and sportsmanlike of him to enter her temple.

She told him that his chief characteristics were kindness and a sympathetic toleration of other people's idiosyncrasies; and he looked at her in his shy, pleasant way, and smiled.

"A sense of humour," he said. "I hope so."

He could have added that Raxby had not any sense of humour and not a great deal of toleration. The feminine part of it regarded it as highly improper that the curate's wife should be the best-dressed woman in the place. Curates' wives had no right to be like that, or to be the centre of attraction, or to have the audacity to hand over six pounds seven shillings and sixpence as the result of an afternoon's palmistry. Miss Plimsol worked it out on the back of a programme. "Two hundred and fifty-five sixpences, time—three till seven, nearly sixty-four people an hour, more than one a minute. Quite impossible! Quite!" The "Twopenny Dip" had brought in thirteen and fourpence! Miss Plimsol sucked the end of her pencil and looked at Mrs. Pemberton's hat.

Never had she seen such a hat! No, never! Certainly not on the head! She scribbled something, one word, under her calculations: "Fools."

There is no doubt that the fête at Tokenhouse Hall initiated the rejuvenation of Raxby.

The men were responsible, more especially the middle-aged gentlemen.

Sir John Toke's dog-cart was seen waiting outside the Pemberton's house. It seemed to wait there every other day. Andie had grapes for his dessert and hot-house flowers on his desk.

Howard Smythe, Esq., had discovered a sudden interest in the boys of the village. He had ideas as to a miniature rifle range, and he came to talk to Andie about it. And Andie had pheasant for dinner.

Toby Sangster, Esq., left his horse at The George. He was a great dandy and the best shot in the county. He thought Pemberton should be backed up in his rejuvenation of the local cricket club. "What! Mr. Pemberton not in? Might I see Mrs. Pemberton?" Faith saw him. Excellent chap Pemberton. Andie received a box of cigars.

When the Gudgeons called on her they came together, and, sitting one on each side of her, spoke mysteriously of the winter dullness of Raxby.

"What we want, Mrs. Pemberton, is a monthly dance at The George. Liven things up, you know. We think you are the very woman to do it."

They chattered in chorus, like a couple of gay parakeets.

"Once a month. Quite select. Liven things up. We are sure your husband wouldn't object."

"Andrew would love it," she said. "He wants people to be happy."

She was Circe, but a very merciful and harmless Circe, and all the offerings that were made her were thrown at the feet of Andrew. He was quite undisturbed; he showed no signs of jealousy; he laughed.

"I knew you would be popular, girl."

"I'm glad," she said, "because there is only one thing I care about. The flower is in your buttonhole, Andie."

She kissed him.

But if she was a harmless Circe to a number of middle-aged English gentlemen, she appeared a very wicked Circe to their wives.

There were debates, discussions.

"My Willie," someone would say, "cannot see anything in her."

Yet half Raxby knew that "Willie" had had tea with the Pembertons twice in one week.

Faith found herself involved in a little world of hostility almost before the less conventional colonial spirit in her had realized the inevitableness of such hostility. Women have a way of expressing themselves without words.

"Mercy! I'm hated!"

She realized the hatred, and she saw it develop into emulation. Raxby had been a very dowdy little country town, the centre of an Arcadian world in which women had ceased to trouble about their plumage. Mrs. Henrietta Smythe lived in her gardening clothes, and on one occasion dead and desiccated snails had been found in the pockets of her apron. Mrs. Mary Sangster wore pork-pie hats and flannel petticoats, and she had a fondness for gaiters. Lady Serena Toke had dignity, but it was a rusty dignity.

And suddenly all these good women began to blossom into a second summer. Mrs. Smythe appeared with wavy hair and wearing a Paris hat. Mary Sangster dis-

appeared for a week and returned like a bride with a trousseau. Lady Toke's new sheaths were still black and stately, but they glistened.

Faith was troubled. And then she saw the human side of it and laughed.

"Hatred — emulation — transfiguration. Why, I am a public benefactress! I have made them all remember that they have husbands and that their husbands are men."

Later, she sensed danger, danger to Andie, and she was challenged by it. She heard rumours. Some pleasant lady smilingly showed her the poisoned knife.

Instantly her love was armed. She had courage, daring, a rather original way of looking at things.

"So you would stab me through him! Well, we will see."

She never quite knew how the idea came to her; it just flashed into her head, though it may have been suggested by some words of Sir John Toke. The idea developed, and its growth was stimulated by a certain interview she had with the Rev. Horace Dunsterby.

He had been attacked. He had been instructed to get rid of Pemberton and Pemberton's wife, and he had refused.

"I was a gentleman before I was a parson," he said.

But he went to see Faith Pemberton, and he had tea with her, and in that tolerantly humorous way of his he set about warning her of her danger. She understood him at once and she thanked him.

"I'm too dressy?"

"Yes," he said, "too disturbingly—ahem—too—"

She saved him from explanations.

"Of course. But haven't you noticed that the dressiness has spread?"

"It has," he agreed, remembering a bill he had paid a week ago, "but even then—"

"Well—?"

"It lags behind, it pursues with Hope and lacking Charity."

She laughed.

"Do you disapprove?"

"I cannot say that I do—but the complexities—! I like you both. Your husband is the best curate I have ever had."

"They want us to go?"

He nodded.

"It shall be on my terms," she said with a flash of fierceness. "You remember the Egyptians, Mr. Dunsterby? I'm a woman and I am very proud of my husband."

He astonished her with a sudden burst of very human sympathy.

"Really, I'd like to see you march out in triumph. Sometimes—here—I would like to initiate an earthquake. But how could you do it?"

She leant towards him over her tea table, and she divulged the idea. He looked at her; he put his cup down; he actually slapped a knee; like Andie, he was very much the man.

"Splendid! The Nelson touch! I shall be tremendously sorry to lose Andrew, but if I can put a sly spoke into the wheel—"

"You will?"

"I will."

So the ladies of Raxby grew kinder to their "Willies," preening their own plumage as women should, but they grew less kind to Faith Pemberton. She continued to be as Mr. Dunsterby had put it. "Too disturbingly—ahem—too—!" and she had an additional reason for her disturbingness. She was particularly kind to Sir John Toke, who insisted upon being called "Uncle Jack" in spite of Lady Serena's new and glistening blackness. There were alarms and excursions. Since the men who were supposed to be in authority refused to rid Raxby of Mrs. Pemberton, it was evident that the exodus would have to be managed.

But how?

Faith knew. She had her eyes on the promised land even before Lady Serena had sighted it. And there was to be no flight across the Red Sea and no forty years in the desert.

One day in November she was sitting at the window, looking at the stucco house and its aspidistras across the way, when she saw Andie walking down High Street. He was walking fast, swinging his arms and seeing no one—which was not his habit. His hat showed an inclination to get itself tilted on to the back of his head.

He came straight upstairs. He had the look of a man to whom some extraordinary thing had happened. His hair was a little ruffled, his grey eyes were grave yet excited. "You'd never guess," he said, closing the door.

She was all innocent curiosity.

"Mr. Gedge is letting you have that field for your football?"

"No; stranger than that, girl."

"Mr. Dunsterby has let you off the Mothers' Guild?"

"Try again."

THE REJUVENATION OF RAXBY

"Tell me, Andie," she said; "I never was good at guessing."

He sat down. He picked up a reel of cotton from the table and looked at it.

"Sir John Toke's brother-in-law, Lord Darcy, has offered me St. Zachary's, Knightsbridge."

"The living?"

"Yes; extraordinary, isn't it?"

She sat very still, loving him.

"Bland has crocked up—overwork."

"The famous Christopher Bland, New Age Bland?"

"Yes."

"His church was packed with men, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Why, Andie, how splendid! You are just the man for it."

He looked at her doubtfully a moment.

"But, girl—I can't preach. I mean——"

"It's just what you can do," she said, "to men."

He got up quickly and kissed her.

"Girl—I'm bowled over. I——"

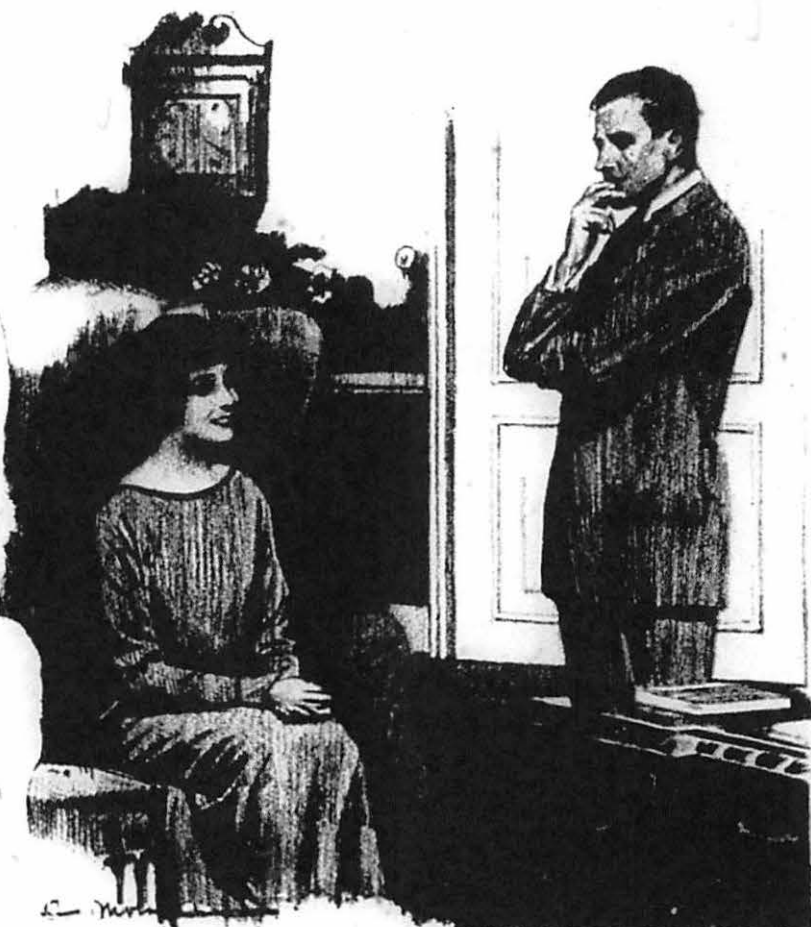
"You have accepted?"

"I said I would come and consult you."

"You dear!" she said, and drew his head down. "Take it. You are going to be a big man, Andie. You—are—a big man. Men want you."

"I'll try," he said.

When they left Raxby their departure was quite a public occasion. The Boy Scouts paraded at the station. There was a crowd of men and boys on the platform, and the crowd included representatives of the local cricket club, the town institute and the ex-servicemen's club. Mr. Dunsterby was there. So were Sir John Toke, Howard Smythe, Esq., Toby Sangster, Esq., and others. People noticed that these gentlemen were not accompanied by their wives. It was also noticed that Mrs



"'Tell me, Andie,' she said; 'I never was good at guessing'"

*Drawn by
C. Morse*

Pemberton was very quietly dressed in black.

There was a cheer when the train drew out.

"Good-bye, sir."

"Good luck, Pemberton."

"We're mighty sorry to lose you."

"Don't forget to break their windows, sir," shouted someone who was a wag.

Andie sat very still, watching Raxby disappear in the greyness of a November dusk.

"Girl," he said presently, "I can't think how I got that living. Me——!"

They were alone, and she came and sat beside him and watched the town grow grey and a mere part of the grey distance of the landscape.

"Because you deserve it, Andie, because you are the very man for it."

She did not tell him that it was because a number of women hated her.

"Bless them," she thought, "bless them—ever so much!"



Sept 1926
Cassell's

The Woman's Part

by WARWICK DEEPING

27

THERE were thirteen of them, and Captain Ault, who lived with his wife and daughter in the thirteenth, had named it "No Luck," and had nailed an ironical horseshoe on the little white pediment of the porch.

This colony huddling itself on a Sussex hillside was not without pathos. A cinder track led up from the main road to serve the needs of these thirteen amorphous buildings. In wet weather the yellow clay oozed through the cindered surface. The bungalows themselves expressed an amateurish diversity; some were white and others brown; some had pink tiled roofs and others roofs of painted corrugated iron. They were of all shapes and sizes, and their gardens lay about them in raw confusion, dotted with futile little tool-sheds and cheap chicken houses.

"What are we here for?"

The whole colony asked that question, and Christina Morgan asked it of Annabel Ault over the fence of cleft chestnut stakes that divided the two gardens.

"What are we here for?"

Poor, gentle, peevish Chrissie Morgan, yearning for things that the colony could not give her!

"We are here to keep up appearances."

"But—why—keep up appearances?"

"Oh, just for the same reason that one uses a tooth-brush, you know."

Annabel Ault had laid a direct finger on the reason for the colony's existence. Directness was her virtue, a brown-eyed and supple frankness; she had shed many illusions; she was a cynic with a rebelliously warm and valiant heart. The colony was a little congeries of people who had failed. It was Colonel Rampion who had bought the land and initiated the idea, a country life for im-

poverished gentlefolk who would not be humiliated by each other's shabbiness and contrivings, a refuge for people who could not compete financially with the fishmonger and the butcher. It would be so much more easy to keep up appearances when you simplified the appearances that had to be kept up. No one would wear a fur coat or own a motor-car, and if nobody kept a domestic—well, no one's pride would be hurt.

The idea had developed. These thirteen little flimsy buildings had arrived one by one. They had the appearance of having been erected by the owners, with some assistance from casual labour. Mr. Nickerson who owned No. 7 had erected two Nissen huts, joined them with a sort of pent-house and painted them white and green. Colonel Rampion was the colony's plutocrat. His white bungalow had a tiled roof and a stoop; and he owned a motor-bicycle and a side-car.

Annabel hated the place. She was sorry for herself, but she was not so much the egoist that she was unable to be sorry for other people.

She was sorry for poor, bald-headed old Geoffrey Ault her father, a man who had failed in everything save in the tying of his ties and the cultivating of good manners. He reminded her of a bald-headed cockatoo, sitting with dignity on a perch, refusing to be surprised at anything, and repeating mechanically certain set phrases.

She was still more sorry for her mother, that graceful and humorous creature whose sense of humour was failing to survive this last cherishing of appearances. Mary Ault was retiring more and more into long and gentle silences; she had the air of putting everything in order before she died.

And Annabel herself?

Oh, well, did she matter? Did anything matter, but the plates that had to be washed and the clay that had to be removed from your boots? The future was not hopeless. A man wanted to marry her—a successful man. He was ready to rescue her from this bungalow world where all these poor and ineffectual gentlefolk hid themselves like the members of a doomed and decaying race. People who could not make money!

Mather Bannerman could make money. He had made money, and was making more money.

He could offer her a flat near Sloan Street and a cottage in Surrey.

Her people wanted her to marry Mather Bannerman. They did not worry her to marry him, but she knew that they wished her to do the safe thing.

She supposed that she would do the safe thing. The prospect did not thrill her, but having seen what model sentiment and love and niceness could do, she appreciated the reasonableness of a future in which she would be the owner of a cheque-book, and able to cultivate a friendly relationship with all the best shops! She had no passion for shopping at the village drapers, or for cleaning boots and plates. No reasonable young woman has.

She stood at the end of the garden and looked across the valley. Christina Morgan was making an attempt to play Schubert on the Morgan piano. It was a terrible piano.

"Tin-pot."

Yes, all this life was a tin-pot affair, a thing of flimsy transitoriness. It betrayed all the makeshifts forced upon miserable refugees. They were no better than refugees, exiled by life's hardness. They were the nice, weak, pleasant people who had ceased to count, and who had been pushed into a corner. They had to be content with third-rate things, old pianos, paraffin lamps, second-hand bicycles, tin bungalows, margarine, a nine-penny seat at a cinema. They could not fight.

"I should like to fight," thought the girl.

She looked across the valley. On the opposite hill, wild with gorse and brown bracken and woodlands, stood a Sussex farmhouse. Its red brick had a lichened greyness. Two huge old pines spread

their crowns above it. The massive central chimney stood up like a rock. It was old; it sat there like some great stolid beast, beautiful in its way—daring life to move it. It had strength, permanence. She could picture it—couchant—with grey claws digging into the soil, sure of itself, defying the possible aggressor.

"Touch me—and I bite."

Yes, the house said that.

She remembered that a man named Trenchard lived there. Her father had just bought a load of cord-wood from the farm.

Annabel heard her father's voice, high-pitched and gentlemanly, and a little thin.

"Ann—my dear—Ann."

He was coming down the muddy path.

"That wood. The farmer man is at the bottom of the road. Where shall we have it?"

The two older people were beginning to appeal to the decisiveness of her youth.

"Close to the cycle shed, on that piece of grass. Then we can store the cut logs in the shed."

"There is a good deal in the shed——"

"Dry wood is important, daddy," and he gave way to her, for she was responsible for the fires.

The farm cart arrived outside the gate of No. 13. It was a blue-coloured cart, with its wheels crusted with mud. The man at the horse's head had eyes of the same colour as the cart, and the brownness of him suggested the soil. He was a rugged young man. He looked at people with fierce directness. He lacked buttons. The strength and burliness of him seemed to resent buttons.

He looked at Captain Ault, ignoring the girl.

"Where do you want it?"

His voice came as a surprise; it was deep and pleasant and refined, in spite of its curt tone.

Annabel replied to him.

"Here, please, on this piece of grass. Do go in, father, it's so raw to-day."

Captain Ault went in.

The man in charge of the cart backed it against the gateway, and proceeded to carry in the wood.

"Here?"

"Yes—there."

He was laconic, and half the wood had been stacked on the patch of grass beside

the shed before either of them broke the silence.

"Pity you can't have it under cover."

"No room," she said; "I am going to saw it up and keep the logs in the shed."

She felt his blue eyes travel over her from ankles to chin.

"Exercise—I suppose?"

"No—necessity."

His tone annoyed her. It had become obvious that he belonged to her own class, and that his roughness was an accretion, like the Sussex mud.

"You haven't got a sawing-stool," he said.

She had to confess that No. 13 had no sawing stool. She had intended using the wheelbarrow. She said so.

He gave her a look of pity.

"Waste of time. Got an axe?"

"A small one."

She produced a hatchet, a cheap thing, and in one of his brown hands it looked even more cheap and flimsy.

"No good. If you had a decent tool I could knock you up a sawing-stool in five minutes."

She felt humiliated, and it annoyed her.

"Thanks. But that's not included in the price of the wood, is it?"

"No. Nor is the stacking. Usually one just tumbles it out of the cart."

"I see," she said, realizing their indebtedness.

He went for more wood, and while he was away she ran round the side of No. 13 and spoke to a man who was pottering about in the garden of No. 12.

"Oh, Mr. Morgan, do you happen to have a big axe or hammer?"

Mr. Morgan owned an old sledge hammer. It was rather loosely hafted, but he lent it to her, and Annabel returned to the shed. Trenchard was coming up the garden path with the last load.

"Is this any good?"

He said that it was.

"Got a bill-hook?"

"You mean a chopper?"

"I suppose you call it a chopper."

She routed a bill-hook from the shed, and stood by while he chose six chestnut stakes from the pile, sharpened them, and drove them into the ground, two by two, in criss-cross fashion. She was impressed. He was extraordinarily capable with his hands. Bill-hook and hammer

functioned as though they were part of him.

"See? You lay the wood in the forks——"

"Thanks so much. I am afraid that we have taken up a lot of your time."

He granted.

"Can't we give you a cup of tea? It must be about tea time."

"Thanks. I have too much to do. Beasts—milking—and all that. By the way, I expect your saw is no good."

"It is a new saw," she said combatively.

"Oh, I dare say. Let's look."

His manners were non-existent, but she brought out the saw. He looked along the line of the teeth.

"Thought so. 'Tisn't set for this sort of job. Take it up to Hill's and tell 'em what it's wanted for. Teeth want setting to clear the cut."

He handed the saw back, nodded, gave her a cursory smile and walked off down the path. She followed him. He had exasperated her, and yet she followed him. She stood at the gate while he replaced the tail-board of the cart.

"Are you Mr. Trenchard?"

"That's so," he said, slipping in a pin, "good afternoon."

And he went off with the blue cart, leaving her standing there.

"What a boor," she thought.

But—somehow—he appeared to her to be a very efficient boor, and when she analysed his rudeness it seemed to her to be no more than the brevity of a capable young man in a hurry. He was a farmer, dealing with realities, beasts and weeds and Sussex clay. Even if he had ever possessed the conventional mannerisms of his class he had lost them. He was a strong, live thing, not too good-tempered, but a friend worth having in a tight corner.

Annabel decided that she disliked him.

"A casual beast," she said to herself.

But her dislike was merely an inward protest against his pity. Probably he had been supremely unconscious of the fact that his attitude had suggested pity. These futile little, tin-pot houses, and the poor futile people who lived in them! Yes—that was it.

And girls—girls who bobbed their hair, and wore flimsy shoes and yellow jumpers, and who spoke mincingly like well brought up little humbugs, and were

useless! He had assumed her to be perfectly helpless. But what was more irritating he had proved to her her own helplessness.

That hatchet!

"I suppose—you—would call it a chopper."

Yes, he was really a very arrogant beast.

She thought of Mather Bannerman and of Mather Bannerman's differences. When three studs were the fashion in a dress-shirt Mather wore them. He could be deferential to women. It might be a pose, but it was a pleasant pose. And he could order a dinner so charmingly, and help you on with your cloak as though he were adjusting it so as not to crush the wings of an angel.

Mather liked his women to be ornamental. He had money. Ornamental women are made for the spending of money. Sweet creatures—subtly perfumed, ready to welcome a man home or to float off with him to a dance or a theatre. No horrid drudgery. No clay on your boots.

Yes, Mather Bannerman was civilized, a man of the world.

Annabel met Trenchard about a week later. She was cycling back from Oakhill, and Trenchard was driving a couple of beasts up to Oakhill market. She got off her bicycle and drew to the side of the road.

He gave a sort of push to his hat.

"All right. Nothing to be afraid of."

Confound the man! His ideas upon women seemed to be early Victorian.

"My brakes don't work very well. That's why I thought it safer——"

He gave her an abrupt smile.

"Women's brakes never do. How's that saw working?"

She did not smile.

"Quite well, thank you."

He went on up the road with his ash stick over his shoulder, driving life before him, and Annabel mounted her bicycle and free-wheeled down to the cinder track that led to the thirteen bungalows.

At the gate of No. 13 she glanced across at the farm house on the slope of the hill.

"It just suits him," she thought; "really, a most detestable person. We might be a lot of rabbits living in hutches."

She went up the path and put her bicycle away.

"Perhaps you are rabbits," said a little inward voice.

Mather Bannerman came down in his car for the week-end. He put up at the "George" at Oakhill, for No. 13 had no spare room.

And Annabel's people were very polite to Mather Bannerman. It hurt Annabel to watch their eager politeness, their truckling—for her sake—to the successful man. Poor dears! Old Ault treasured a few cigars for very special occasions, and Mather smoked three of them. He dined at No. 13 on the Saturday night, and the dinner absorbed the money for a whole week's housekeeping. He was an expensive person, but then he was proposing to make the future safe for Annabel.

On the Sunday he came to collect Annabel for a drive, bringing his light two-seater car—he owned two cars—up the cinder road to No. 13.

"I ought to teach her to drive, you know," he said to Mrs. Ault; "she may find it usefull—later."

Annabel overheard the remark, and it suggested to her that Mather Bannerman was inclined to take it for granted that she would marry him. There was supposed to be an understanding between them, though she wore no ring.

Annabel was not pleased. She felt less sure of the future.

"Are we going far?" she asked, entering the cramped little living-room.

"Just as far as you like."

His successful smile implied that the day was hers to do with it as she pleased.

"I don't think I want to go very far."

She had a moody air, and, as things turned out, they got no farther than the point where the cinder-track debouched upon the main road, for Bannerman, handling his car with the over-confidence of the successful man who has a pretty girl beside him, took the main road at too high a speed, and landed the car with the near fore wheel in the opposite ditch.

It was a deepish ditch, and it was half full of water, and since the reverse gear refused to bring the car out of it, Bannerman climbed out and fumed. Annabel's experience of him had included nothing but smooth occasions. She had never seen him up against unregenerate and hostile matter.

He gave one useless heave at one of the dumb-irons and swore.

"The damned fools who design these things! I always said there was not enough lock on the steering-gear."

His fretfulness was a point to be noted. He looked up the road and down the road, angrily helpless. Annabel remained quite still.

"Damned nuisance! Have to be pulled out. Could you bike up to Oakhill, old thing, and get hold of some of the garage people?"

Annabel remained in the car. She had seen a figure emerge from the lane a little lower down the road, and the figure was coming towards them.

"Couldn't it be lifted out?"

He gave her a glance of impatience.

"I'm not getting in a mess—"

"But it is not a very heavy car—"

Mather Bannerman refused the combat. And then Trenchard arrived and stood in the middle of the road, after jerking the brim of his hat at Annabel.

"Bogged!" he observed.

Bannerman became ironical.

"Well—it does look like it, doesn't it?"

The girl surrendered to a natural impulse.

"I thought it might be lifted out, Mr. Trenchard—but Mr. Bannerman says—"

"So it could," said Trenchard.

"My dear sir—if you think—"

Trenchard ignored the successful man. He stood on the grass verge and looked considerably at the front wheels of the car.

"Shall I get out?" asked the girl.

"No need. Is the brake on?"

"Yes."

He got hold of the two dumb-irons, lifted the front of the chassis till the bogged wheel was clear, and, side-stepping and slewing the car round, replaced the wheels upon the road.

Mr. Bannerman was annoyed, but outwardly grateful.

"I say—I'm awfully obliged. We can get on now."

Trenchard was eyeing the front of the car.

"You have bent your axle," he said,



"I'm healthy and strong. I should want my share of the job."

laconically; "look at that wheel."

Annabel Ault's Sabbath drive began and ended there.

Some time in November it was suggested by one or two of the younger members of Bungalow Town that to enliven the dullness of the winter it would be an excellent plan to organize a series of fortnightly dances. The George Inn at Oakhill had a good-sized room that could

be hired for the evening, and Christina Morgan knew of a pianist who would play rag-time for half a guinea a night. The inspirers of the plan appealed to Annabel Ault, for Annabel had a reputation for energy.

They held a committee meeting in the Aults' sitting-room, and the discussion turned on the question of partners.

"But where are we to find the men?"

They tabulated the possible males, and Annabel acted as scribe.

Young Griffiths, the doctor's son.

The Rev. John Smiles, the curate.

Reggie Parsons, of the firm of Parsons and Wagborne, solicitors.

Two pupils at Mr. Vandeleurs' fruit farm.

Archie Brown, who was up at Oxford, and who might be available during the Christmas vacation.

Colonel Rampion. Colonel Rampion danced.

That made a possible seven.

Mrs. Ault, from her chair beside the fire, suggested a likely addition:

"Mather might come down for the week-end, and bring another dancing-man with him."

"Yes," said Annabel doubtfully, "he—might."

It was decided that they should canvass likely enthusiasts, and Annabel and Gwen Hartshorn were authorized to act in the matter.

"If we could make sure of a dozen men—"

Annabel had remembered Mr. Miles Trenchard.

So the Oakhill Dance Club came into being. Young Griffiths, Reggie Parsons, the two pupils at the fruit farm, and the other necessary males were very ready to be persuaded. Colonel Rampion was asked to be the presiding genius of the club, and he assented gaily. He was still something of a lad. When the establishing of the club was assured, Annabel again remembered Mr. Trenchard. She went up to canvass him as a possible member.

It was about half-past three in the afternoon. She found herself standing outside a white gate in a white fence, and looking at a derelict garden. It was a deplorable garden. A bricked path, green with weeds, led up to the front door, and the front door was open.

Annabel walked up the path. The door led directly into a room that appeared

to serve as a sitting-room, lounge hall and kitchen. A meal had been left on the table; there were unwashed plates, a pile of them. And, hanging over a chair, was the blue and-white-striped coat of a pyjama suit.

Something stirred in Annabel—a surprised compassion. She raised the knocker and let it fall, but when no one answered the knock she stepped swiftly into the room, all eyes and ears. And what a room it was: a helpless and womanless room, full of the evidence of male makeshifts. The stove needed blacking—it was all rusty; there was a hole in the carpet, and the stuffing was protruding from the solitary arm-chair. Annabel, guiltily, snatched up the pyjama coat. There was not a button upon it.

She heard footsteps, and, throwing the coat over the back of the chair, she fled for the doorstep and raised the knocker.

"Hallo! Oh, it's you, Miss Ault."

He looked annoyed.

"Yes. I'm afraid you'll think me an awful nuisance—"

"Oh—why?"

"We have started a dance club, and we are looking up possible members."

"Come in a moment. My place—"

He glanced round the room.

"It's an awful piggery. No time—you see, for refinements. Now—I ask you—does it look as though I had time to dance?"

The winter sunlight shining through seemed to find a sudden softness in her eyes.

"No. Haven't you—anybody—?"

"I'm my own cook, housemaid, and all that. Farming's a tight job these days."

"But—all work— You ought to play—sometimes."

"When are these dances?"

"Every other Saturday."

"Well—perhaps—I might come," he said curtly: "one has to be a little silly—sometimes."

He did come to some of the dances. His dinner-jacket was badly creased, and his shirt lacked gloss, and he wore a ready-made tie, but he danced surprisingly well. She enjoyed those dances. She enjoyed them so fiercely that when her mother reminded her of Mather Bannerman she said that Mather was too superfine for a village show.

Mrs. Ault, who was a woman of understanding, hid her disappointment.

Captain Ault was sent to call on Mr. Trenchard. He came back looking depressed.

"Quite a decent chap," he said to his wife, "but his house is the filthiest thing—"

And Trenchard began to behave most strangely. They asked him to tea, and he refused—almost rudely.

"Sorry—I'm too busy."

He missed two dances, but he turned up at the last of the series, and it appeared that Annabel was too busy to dance with him. He stood at one end of the room and watched her, and half-way through the evening he behaved like a pirate, cutting her out from under the very jaws of her next partner.

"I want this dance."

"I'm sorry—"

He stood squarely in front of her.

"I suppose I have offended you. How?"

"Does it matter?"

"Was it—because I refused your people—?"

"Perhaps."

"Well—don't be silly. I wouldn't come because— Well, you know my place is a bit of a pigsty; I can't help it. But if you will give me this dance—"

"Well?"

"I'll stay up half one night and tidy up, and then—perhaps—you'll bring your people over—"

She gave herself to him for that dance, and in the midst of it she asked him a question:

"I suppose you think I'm a useless snob?"

"I don't think anything of the kind. Don't you understand that I am having to fight to make good? I can't afford the nicenesses— So you see—"

"I do understand. We'll come. But you are not to tidy up."

"I must."

"Why not let me come over with a scrubbing brush and a cake of soap?"

She laughed, but there was a deep thrill in her laughter, and she felt the pressure of his big hand against her body.

"You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it."

"Let's say next Tuesday."

At nine o'clock on the Tuesday Annabel

brought her bicycle out of the shed, and slung a bag over the handlebars. The bag contained a scrubbing brush, two cakes of yellow soap, some house flannel and a tin of metal polish. It was a brisk March day, with massive white clouds moving in a brilliant sky, a day of liveness and courage.

The farm-house door stood open. She saw nothing of Trenchard, for he was out on the farm, leaving her a free and unconventional world to conquer.

A good fire was burning. She made her way into the kitchen and scullery, and wisps of vapour rising here betrayed his forethought. He had filled the copper and lit a fire under it.

"Bless him," she thought; "he has taken me at my word."

She put on an apron, routed out a bucket and a broom, and for the next three hours she forgot how the time passed. She scrubbed and dusted and polished, and when she had fought and conquered the kitchen floor she stood leaning upon her broom, reflecting upon the nature of the conquest.

"Not once—on a day like this—but every day—year in—year out—until he and I have won the fight. What we call drudgery. Well—with my eyes wide open—yes. It's giving. Life's nothing unless you have the courage to give."

Suddenly she saw him standing there in the doorway in his rough clothes. And yet he looked different. His eyes were gentle—proud.

"So you meant it?"

"Of course—I meant it."

He glanced about him.

"Heavens—what a difference! And yet—it's not only what you have done—"

"No?"

"It's—what—what you have brought into the place."

He crossed to her quickly and stood looking straight into her eyes.

"Ann—I can't afford a servant—not yet. But things are not going so badly. Would you let me—presently—?"

She smiled at him.

"I'm not a parasite. I'm healthy and strong. I should want my share of the job. And I can do it, can't I? Look round—criticize."

But he did not look at her handiwork; he looked straight at her.

"You've got grit. It's a darned shame, but I'm loving you."

THE ACE OF HEARTS

By WARWICK DEEPING

I



ARRIVED at the Grand Hotel at Le Paradis in time to dress for dinner, and I did half my dressing on the balcony of my room, watching the mountains grow black in a red and opalescent sky. The sea was a deep blue, and from under the purple wings of the coming night the lighthouse on the rocky ridge of Ile d'Or had begun to blink like a great eye.

I was tired, and still a little submerged in the backwash of the war. In England life had been absurdly irritating; nothing had happened as we had expected it to happen; I had held out my hand to Labour and Labour had spat in my face.

"Look here, Herrick," my doctor-man had said to me, "get out of this for three months. You are too nervy still for the rough and tumble. Go south and soak yourself in sunshine."

"I've a sore brain," I had confessed.

"Exactly. A man can't crash twice at your age and come back to the old life as though nothing had happened."

In the *salle à manger* the *maitre d'hôtel* showed me to a little table against the wall. I sat down and looked about me. The room seemed full of women, old women, fat women, thin women, women with shawls, women in spectacles, women with wrinkled old faces, sour women, women who stared like ancient cows. It was a veritable salon of antiquities. There were a few men, but not one of them looked under fifty. Here and there some girl wedged in among the ruins glanced at me with a sort of pathetic and hungry interest. I was young. I was a man; but I admit that I was depressed.

"Good heavens!" I thought, "where do they all come from? What are they doing here?"

I soon realized that they were absorbed in the joy of eating. It was age-tearing feverishly with its blunt teeth at the last shreds of life. At the next table were four old ladies and one girl; the old ladies wore white blouses with turned-down collars and little white bows; their jaws moved; their wrinkled cheeks seemed to creak like leather; one wore black spectacles that completely hid her eyes, another pince-nez, a third, the owl-like tortoise-shell

rimmed glasses of America, the fourth, a green shade. I met the eyes of the girl. She looked pale, bloodless, vacant; these old women were sucking her blood.

Their conversation came to me in whiffs.

"Gargon, this fish is uneatable."

"At the 'Splendide' they give you butter with the spinach."

"Did you hear that Mrs. Betts took two oranges to her room, and they charged for them in the bill!"

"My dear, how paltry!"

"I wish they would give us more gravy with the meat."

I hurried through my dinner, and went down to the lounge, feeling irritable and disappointed. I was filling a pipe, and telling myself—"You must get out of this," when I caught sight of a big man—black-bearded—with the head of a Russian, talking to the concierge in the vestibule. It was Brander, the English vice-consul at Le Paradis—Brander whom I had known very well before the war, and who had been responsible for my coming to Le Paradis.

I fell upon him.

"Hallo!" he said, "I had strolled round to see if you had arrived."

He smiled at me with his shrewd, calm eyes, and his big head was like a bit of life. There was something vital, yet unexpected, about Byron Brander. He was mysterious, a man who failed to tone with modernity. He was English and yet he was not English. You saw the Phœnician in him, the Provençal, the Norman, the Lombard, the kin of Ruric, the blood of Ulysses. He was big, very big; his great, square, sombre head seemed to look at you out of the canvas of an old Vandyke.

"You are a nice fellow. What on earth made you billet me in this—"

"Charnel house!"

He laughed, and lit a cigar.

"Come outside into the garden and look at the stars. You must live somewhere. They feed you well at the Grand."

"But the old—"

"Man—I got them all day and every day. They even come and ask me if I can do anything about their false teeth! They will melt into the background, vanish, when you begin to realize Provence. A little dust in a corner—no more than that."

We went outside on to the terrace and

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saw the lights of Le Paradis mimicking the stars. There were chairs standing under a great breathless, shadowy palm, and the night smelt warm and fragrant. We sat down and Brander began to ask me about myself, but I was bored with myself and told him so.

He listened, his great sagacious head like the head of a statue by Rodin.

"*Tiens!*" he said, "you need renewing, that's all. You want to get back to the soil—see our peasants here growing out of it. Provence in the spring! That will cure you. Life will ooze up into your feet—like sap into a tree."

"You are still a romanticist."

"Call me a vitalist."

"It's an illusion—romance. Just look what we become, like those old things in there, gobbling and grumbling—"

Brander laughed in his beard, that curious, inward laugh of his.

"Nonsense. An hotel like this is always full of people who never learnt how to live, people who are always trying to run away from the dullness they have made of themselves. Romance! Good lord, man! It grows on the hedges."

"I'd like to see it growing," I said, a little irritably.

He turned to me, and the end of his cigar glowed.

"Would you? You doubting Thomas! It depends on a man's eyes, and his inward eyes—his imagination. Take down the map reference."

"Imaginary?"

"That depends. To-morrow morning walk down to the sea by the lane that leaves the Hermitage Hill and runs through the pinewoods. You will find a little bay. Turn to the right, and follow a path. It will bring you to a wall and a hedge of cypresses."

"I look over the wall, I suppose?"

"Yes, you find a place where you can look over the wall. The rest will depend—"

"On my imagination?"

"That—and certain sensitiveness to impressions."

"All right," I said, "I'll go. And shall I report to you in the evening?"

"Come and dine at my villa."

"That's something definite to look forward to!"

"Herrick," he said, "don't mock. Everything can be forgiven, everything—save mockery."

In following the path that he had mapped out for me, I was following a mere vague curiosity, a curiosity tinged with the morbid cynicism of a man whose vitality had sunk very low. But this land of the south laughed with the joy of living. They were ploughing the fat red soil in the valley. Peach trees in blossom floated like

pink clouds against the blue of the sky. The sun shone clear and strong. I saw the vines a-row, smelt violets and mimosa and the sweet perfume of the pines. An old man, brown as a rock, sang and chuckled like a bird as he pruned his olive trees. Nature, exuberant, glowing, exhaling perfume from her warm body, ran wild in the woods and fields, and where her feet touched the earth she left a pattern of sunlight in the young wheat or the grass.

I wandered through the pinewoods beyond the Hermitage Hill, and found the lane that led to the sea. It was a sheet of blue and silver between the ilexes and olives, and it made no more than a little quiet splashing among the rocks. I turned to the right, and reached a stone wall and a row of cypresses, found a spot where the soil was banked against the wall, and, climbing the bank, looked over into Brander's garden of romance.

The place had become a wilderness. It was full of ecstasy of growth, covered with a foam of greenness and of flowers. Roses and vines had climbed up the trees and over the bushes, and the very trees embraced each other. Mimosa had spread into the palms. Ilex and pistachio were looped and tangled with climbing maiden-hair and bryony. The spaces were thick with anemones and tulips, and the pink flowers of the cistus. The mysterious tangle of it all seemed to hide something, a secret sadness, a shadow as of unshed tears.

Beyond the trees I could catch a glimpse of the white walls and green shutters of a villa. There was not a sound to be heard save the twittering of birds and the hum of bees, and the muffled splashing of the sea.

"Something has happened here."

A voice seemed to speak from the depths in me, and then I laughed.

"Old Brander was always a picturesque sentimentalist!"

The fractiousness of the sick man in me refused to be humoured. I turned away, and following the wall towards the sea, found myself above a glacis of rock covered with mesembryanthemum, sea-pink, thrift, and thyme. There were steps leading down to a tiny cove where a boat could lie in calm weather. An iron gate in the wall opened on the steps.

It occurred to me that I could obtain a view of the villa from this gate. I moved towards it along the wall, and then stood still, looking at a figure that seemed to glide like a reflection of myself in a half-darkened mirror. The gate posts were the frame of the mirror, its backing an avenue of cypresses shading a path that led to the gate. The figure was the figure of a woman. We had surprised each other, and for a moment we stood and stared.

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I suppose that no more than five seconds elapsed before she moved on past the gate and disappeared. I had had but a glimpse of a girl in a white dress, a strangely sensitive figure that seemed to float across a beam of light and vanish. I had had the impression of a pair of startled eyes of the same colour as the shadows under the cypresses, of a face that was mysteriously disturbing in that one seemed to be looking at a soul rather than at a face. In no other way can I describe the impression that it made on me. It was as though I had stood at the gateway of Hades and seen some tragic figure flash past, a figure whose flesh was a garment of pale light.

I sat down on the rocks and stared at the sea.

II

We had dined, and were sitting under the mimosa tree in Brander's garden. The smoke from his cigar drifted into the broad light-ray thrown from one of the windows and made little threads and cloudlets of silver.

"So you saw her," he said. "It is very rarely that she is seen."

"Does she live alone—there?"

"Alone—with one woman. An old gardener who has a cottage up on the hills goes to work there each day."

"And the reason?"

"Oh, she is mad, you know," said Brander; "that is to say—the ordinary person would consider her mad."

I was shocked—astonished.

"Do you mean to say that she is insane, and that they let her live there all alone?"

"It is not the sort of madness that people interfere with."

"Then what sort of madness is it?"

Brander sat forward in his chair, his elbows resting on his knees.

"Of course, we are all of us mad, a little more or a little less. You admit that?"

"I don't," I said.

He laughed that curious, inward laugh of his.

"Herrick, let's agree that the ordinary stodgy person is comfortably sane; he responds to mere stimuli of the grosser sort; and we are not concerned with the stodgy person. When I speak of madness, I am thinking—perhaps—of the supernatural, or of those psychic states that an ordinary consciousness cannot account for. Sonia Lecroix is not mad. She only sees farther, feels more, than we do."

"So her name is Sonia Lecroix."

I felt Brander looking at me in the darkness

"What's in a name? Of course, Herrick, if you are in a mocking mood—"

"I'm not. Something cured me of that—this morning."

"Then I'll tell you about her."

He lay back in his chair with that big, reposeful calm of his that made him so convincing.

"Sonia is half French, half English. Her people brought her up in the old-fashioned French fashion, and had her educated at a convent. Then they married her to Lecroix, an officer in the Flying Corps. That was just before the war. Sonia was one of those very sensitive women with a passion for idealizing things and people, and when Lecroix went to the war, I think she thought him a sort of Galahad. He wasn't. He was just a very ordinary sort of Frenchman, addicted to the sex adventure."

"I don't know how Sonia discovered that he had a mistress in Paris and was spending part of his leaves there. She was shocked—revolted. I gather there was a scene. She has told me that she said to him, 'May your evil passions be scorched—as you have scorched my love for you.'"

"Lecroix went back to the front. Two days later he was brought down in flames."

"The coincidence of the tragedy seems to have been a spiritual shock to Sonia. Her people were dead, and she was wealthy. She bought the Villa Morgana, and she has lived there ever since. She goes nowhere, and sees no one but myself. I know her mother, and she sent for me when she came here, and asked me to manage her affairs. She seemed to trust me at once, like a child; I don't know why. That is her story, and you say that there is no romance!"

His cigar had gone out and he relit it. I watched the light of the match playing on his face.

"I admit the romance," I said. "And you say she never leaves the place?"

"I was wrong there. Once a week a carriage calls for her and drives her to the foot of the Hermitage Hill. She goes up alone to the crucifix, and spends an hour there. Then she drives home."

"And you say she is mad?"

Brander was silent for a moment, like a man in the presence of some sacred thing.

"Don't you realize," he said, "that there is something abnormal behind all this—that she is the creature of obsession. We are all obsessed by something—in a greater or less degree. What Sonia Lecroix's obsession is I don't quite know. I have a suspicion that it concerns her husband, his sudden death, and those last prophetic words of hers to him. It may be that. I do not know."

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"She has never spoken to you of it?"

"Never."

He told me more of her life at the Villa Morgana as he had glimpsed it during his occasional visits, and his interest in her made me wonder whether he dreamed of rescuing her from the aftermath of her tragedy. I had known Brander as an almost savage bachelor; but it was possible that he might have been waiting for the one, unique woman.

He seemed to read my thoughts.

"No, my lad; my interest in her is without ulterior motives. It might have been otherwise; I'll be frank about it; I realized that I was too much of the hardy old swashbuckler to persuade her soul to come back to earth."

His humility touched me, for I knew the pride of the man.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

And then he laughed.

"You see, I have no appeal. I am too solid. I have not suffered. I haven't sad eyes, or ruined health, or any of those pathetic failings that make a woman run to comfort your fool-boy of a man."

"I should have thought—" I began.

But he cut me short.

"No, I do not think that Sonia Lecroix will make that mistake a second time—even if she were in the position to make it. What I mean is—she would not idolize the man. It would be a much more human affair."

And then he astonished me.

"I'm going to see her to-morrow. Walk over with me, and perhaps I shall be allowed to introduce you."

I sat up and stared at him.

"Look here, Brander," I said, "what exactly do you mean?"

He puffed smoke.

"Your letter suggested the idea," he said laconically; "you are rather above the average, Herriek."

I laughed.

"My dear chap!"

"I don't want the second man to be a Frenchman."

"Well—I'm—"

"No, you are not damned; nor am I the eccentric idiot you imagine. Come over and be introduced to her."

I was a little bewildered by the astonishing audacity of his suggestion.

"But you say yourself that she sees nobody."

"She may consent to see a man whom I shall introduce as my own particular friend."

"And am I to infer that I am to interest myself—"

He answered me almost fiercely.

"For Heaven's sake drop that beastly English trick of pseudo-cynical facetiousness. Give up the English social varnish, the egg shell lustre. And hang your interest! I suppose if I offered to take some Burlington Bertie to the house of Beatrice or the home of Laura, he would shoot his cuffs and ask me if she played bridge."

He had stung me not a little.

"I'll go," I said, "and I'll not ask her if she plays bridge. But it is a rather extraordinary proposition, Brander."

"Is it!" he retorted. "Wait and see."

Brander lunched with me the following day, and we strolled down to the sea through the sunshine and the perfumes of an April afternoon. A man may be most blind when he thinks that he sees most clearly, and neither Brander nor I realized our blindness, nor could we have imagined the strangeness of that second tragedy that was about to threaten Sonia Lecroix. Brander left me at the sea-gate and walked up the cypress avenue to the villa, and I sat down on a rock and watched the sea spreading calmly towards Ile d'Or and the headland of Tête Noir. I felt curiously excited. It was as though the place held a spell.

Presently I heard Brander's footsteps returning.

"Dick—"

I stood up.

"Come along. You are admitted."

We passed up the avenue of cypresses and emerged upon a circle of grass in front of the white villa. Palms, olives, cypresses, and pines threw their shadows upon the grass and upon the white walls of the house, and the grass itself was starred with red and purple anemones. Under a palm tree, whose foliage spread a dome-shaped roof, stood two chairs, and in one of them sat Sonia Lecroix. She rose as we crossed the grass towards her.

I admit that I looked at her for signs of the malady that Brander had spoken of; but my critical faculties were smothered by Sonia Lecroix herself. From the moment that she moved I saw in her something distracting and exquisitely strange. She had that indescribable and flowing grace that is seen in the movements of a wild creature—a litheness, a youthful softness that is largely unselfconscious. Her eyes were like black velvet, and they looked at you steadily and without fear. Her face was not instantly and obviously beautiful. The mouth was vivid and expressive, with the upper lip slightly lifted at the centre of the bow; the nose rather short; the forehead low and broad. It was what I should call a "woodland face," full of mysterious lights and shadows; elusive, pale, pure, yet richly sexed.

By Warwick Deeping

Brander was introducing me:
"Herrick is out here for his health. He had his wings broken twice during the war."

I saw a strange little tremor of emotion pass across her face.

"So you fought in the air."

She held out her hand to me.

"You look—a little too old."

"I was too old," I said; "that was my trouble."

I bowed over her hand, and then—for a moment—we stood looking at each other, and I believe that in that moment all manner of wonderful things happened to us. What she saw in me Heaven knows! Perhaps she saw more than I was conscious of, a rather peevish and restless creature, a thing to be touched and pitied, a soul to be healed. I know that I saw in her something that sent the blood to my brain. I went down like grass to the scythe.

We sat under the palm trees, Madame Lecroix and Brander in the chairs, and I on the grass and facing them. We talked—at least they talked, and I sat and looked at her like a bemused boy. And somehow her eyes seemed to look at me as though my silence said more to her than Brander's words.

We had tea there. It was brought out to us by her woman Suzanne. Suzanne interested me, and I disliked her from the first glance. She was tall and austere, with a crumpled, mean mouth and hard, grey eyes. It seemed to me that she looked at Brander and myself as though she had stolen money and feared that we might take it away.

Before we left the Villa Morgana Madame Lecroix showed us her garden. It was a wilderness of many acres, stretching from the sea to the lower slopes of the hills.

"I let it grow as it pleases," she explained to me, "in spite of old Jean, who grumbles and shakes her head. A garden is so much more beautiful when it is not worried."

"I understand," I said; "we make the mistake of fussing Nature. You let her paint her own pictures."

"Only Nature and plutocrats can afford to do that," said Brander, smiling in his beard.

Only once did I notice anything unusual in Sonia Lecroix. We were standing in a little grove of cypresses and pines, watch-



The figure was the figure of a woman. We had surprised each other, and for a moment we stood and stared

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ing the tits and linnets in the trees, and suddenly she remained very still—listening. She seemed for the moment to have gone far away from us. Her eyes looked dark and clouded.

"It is nothing."

She smiled a smile of relief.

"Only—the birds."

Brander and I glanced at each other. I felt that there was another life, another world, something unseen by us beneath the surface of her normal consciousness.

We walked home in the glow of the evening, and the light shone within me, for she had asked me to visit her again. We were crossing the lower ridge of the Hermitage Hill when Brander pointed up through the pinewoods with his stick.

"That is where she goes—each week. The crucifix is up there."

I nodded.

"Do you know the day?"

"Yes, each Friday—Lecroix was killed on a Friday."

We walked on; and then he asked me a question:

"Did you notice anything?"

"Once."

"When we were standing under those trees?"

"Yes."

Brander frowned.

"She was right away from us," he said; "in some other world. I wonder what happens in that other world?"

III

The next day happened to be a Friday, and the afternoon found me climbing the Hermitage Hill. The path began in vineyards and gardens and then zigzagged into a wood of Mediterranean pines. The branches of the trees met overhead, and the broad and rocky path flowed below them like a torrent of stone. Only here and there could you see the sky, for the crowded trunks of the trees and their interlacing branches hid it from view.

The woodland tunnel took a sudden turn to the right, and I saw through its open archway the great crucifix intensely black against the blue of the sky. But I saw more than the crucifix. A low, semicircular wall of stone bordered the little platform on the edge of the hill, and standing on this low wall was a man. His arms were spread as though he were mimicking the crucifix, and his figure showed black against the sky.

It is probable that I should have thought his presence there a mere coincidence had it not been for the cross-like poise of his figure, for that poise of his struck me as

being so singular that I paused in the shadows and watched him. The mystery and the silence of the place had made me more sensitive to vague impressions, and somehow I connected the man's figure with Sonia's weekly pilgrimage to the lonely cross upon the hill.

Suddenly he disappeared. He had jumped off the wall and vanished behind it. I looked at my wrist-watch. It was three o'clock, and Brander had told me that Sonia's carriage usually called for her at half-past two.

I did not know it then, but my whole future turned on the chance of my divining the man's presence here to be more than a mere coincidence. I did suspect it; why, I do not know. I left the path, and pushing in among the trees, worked my way towards the sunlight and the undergrowth at the seaward end of the hill. I had to pick my way very carefully because of the loose stones and the fir-cones and the dead wood, and I did the last twenty yards of the journey on all fours, crawling like a man-ape.

There was an old, twisted pine just ahead of me, its great rooty stub making a mound above the level of the ground. I made for it, and raising my head slowly, looked out over the smother of cistus, broom, wild lavender, and yellow spurge. The crucifix and semicircular wall was above me and on my left, the ground falling sharply away from it towards the southern slope of the hill. For a while I saw nothing; there was no sign of the man; and then my eyes noticed a dwarf, flat-topped ilex almost directly in front of me, and about twenty yards away. The tree was no more than a bush, spread out like an umbrella, its outer foliage almost touching the ground; but there was something under the ilex, and that something was a man.

I pulled my cap down over my eyes and kept absolutely still. At first, he had seemed part of the tree, but his figure gradually disentangled itself, and I saw him as one sees a bird hidden in a tree. He wore dark clothes and a black, soft hat; he had his back to the trunk of the ilex; and his face was seen in profile. I could not distinguish his features, for he was too much in the shadow and half hidden by leaves.

I dare say that I had watched the man for three or four minutes when I heard the sound of footsteps on the stone path leading to the crucifix. The fellow under the tree heard them soon after I did, and I saw him stretch out an arm as though to make an opening in the foliage, and I realized that he could make a squint hole through which he could watch the crucifix while remaining invisible to anyone standing above.

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I turned my head and saw Sonia Lecroix walk to the great cross. She was dressed in black and wore a white, gauzy scarf over her dark hair. Her face looked calm with the calmness of one who is asleep. I saw her kiss the beam of the crucifix and then stand with closed eyes as though she were praying.

I glanced again towards the ilex tree. The man had not moved, and as I then thought him nothing more than a possible sneak-thief or bully, I watched him and waited for him to move. But he remained in ambush. He appeared to be absorbed in gazing at Sonia. I do not think he made a single movement all the while she was standing by the cross.

She remained there about twenty minutes, sitting on the stone wall and looking out over the sea. Her face retained its dreaming calmness, and it was quite obvious that she had no thought of being watched. When she rose to go she moved languidly, almost as though some of her vitality had been taken from her. She looked tired.

I glanced again at the man, but he did not stir, and his immobility struck me as very singular. It occurred to me that his motive—if he had a motive—was more subtle and personal than the one with which I had credited him. I held my ground.

Sonia Lecroix's footsteps had died away before he came crawling out from under his ilex bush. He stood up and dusted his clothes, and I was able to get a good look at him with the dark foliage of the ilex for a background. He was a smallish man, either French or Italian, wiry, with a clever, clear cut face, a neat little black moustache, and eyes set rather close together. He was well dressed, and made me think of an officer in mufti. I can remember being struck by the redness of his mouth, and by the way his masticatory muscles seemed to stand out, giving the lower part of his face a hungry and lascivious expression. I did not like the man. He looked what one calls a "clever little devil," hot, adventurous, yet calculating even in his adventures.

He climbed back to the cross and sat on the wall with his back turned towards me, and I took the opportunity of retreating into the wood. I did not wish him to see me so near the crucifix, and I walked back through the pines, and sat down beside the path about half-way down the hill. I had calculated on his taking the path, and on my being able to follow him, but I did not see him again. I waited for half an hour before walking up again to the crucifix. He had gone.

I went straight back to Le Paradis, and found Brander in his office. He was busy with some old lady who had had her vanity-

bag stolen in a shop. When he had disposed of her he called me in.

I glanced at the clerk who was scribbling at another table. Brander understood.

"Go out and change those notes for me, will you, Gaston?"

The lad went.

I sat down on the far side of Brander's desk.

"I suppose you know most of the people in Le Paradis?" I asked him.

"It is a shifting population, my son. But why? Do you want an introduction to some particular person?"

"I am wondering whether you would recognize a particular man?"

"Describe him."

I described the man of the ilex tree, and I saw that Brander's curiosity was piqued.

"A red mouth and very pronounced masticatory muscles! I seem to remember someone—but I can't place him yet. What is the gentleman's significance?"

And then I told him what I had seen, and the more idle interest went out of Brander's eyes. He sat forward and leant his elbows on his desk.

"Blessed be human curiosity, Herrick! I condone it in you, man. I had always wondered when it might happen."

"Then you don't think me a fool?"

He frowned and spoke slowly and emphatically:

"Far from it. You do not know France as I know it, Dick. It is a wonderful country with a wonderful people, but there are certain aspects of French life that are foreign to us. Sex is much the same all the world over, but in France there is a certain type of Frenchman, the man who combines violent passions with a most infernally quick eye for the dollar."

I nodded, and Brander went on:

"I have always wondered whether some enterprising adventurer, some Don Juan with a stock-jobber's soul, would discover Sonia Lecroix. She is one of the prizes in the great lottery. I knew that it would not surprise me if the gentleman arrived. Perhaps he has arrived. We shall see."

He pulled out a notebook and picked up his pen.

"Give me every detail you can remember."

I gave him them.

"There are not many young men of that class resident here. I know the officers of the garrison. Then there is the aviation school, a partly civilian affair."

He reflected, staring at what he had written.

"Yes, that's an idea."

And then he smiled.

"The test will be next Friday. I'll go with you to the crucifix, unless——"

"Of course you will come with me," I

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said; "if there is anything serious in this affair, it belongs to you more than to me."

He nodded his great head at me.

"Perhaps, my son. Perhaps not!"

IV

We may have thought ourselves rather clever people, but we were to discover that our cleverness was a mere thing of the soil, a crawling creature, a tortoise hunting a hawk. We had told each other that we should have to wait for a week before we might expect any further suggestion from Sonia's hypothetical lover. We were wrong.

It was on the Sunday that I first saw the aeroplane. I had scrambled to the top of Mt. Farfadet, and from it I had a gorgeous view of the coastline, Ile d'Or and the islets, and the Tête Noir, and I could see the Villa Morgana and its garden from below me like a white rock and a little green foam on the edge of the sea. I was sprawling on the grass when I heard the hum of the machine's engine droning somewhere in the blue. It was a familiar sound, still vaguely distressing to me, for I had come out of the war with one of those blind terrors that are tangled up in the skein of one's fretted nerves. I could never hear the sound of an aeroplane without a queer thrill in my vitals; a sense of menace and of some impending catastrophe.

I sat up and looked for the machine, and for a minute I saw its silhouette hanging above the grey ridge of Ile d'Or. Then I lost sight of it again, and thought that it had disappeared beyond the island, though the hum of the engine seemed more distinct. Half a minute must have elapsed before I picked it up once more. It was flying low over the sea, and was almost indistinguishable, for the planes were painted a light blue. The thing looked like a great blue-winged dragonfly gliding above the calm water.

The aeroplane was heading straight for the Villa Morgana. It began to rise as it neared the shore, and I expected to see it turn and make away over the headland or back over the sea. But not a bit of it. The machine held on until it appeared to hang right over the villa, and then it began to circle round and round like a hawk sailing in search of its prey.

I sat rigid, watching it, yet I did not realize that there was any purpose in the aeroplane's manoeuvres. It flew steadily round and round at the same height, and the roar of its engine echoed up the valley. I wondered what the pilot was doing, what caprice had persuaded him to circle over that very spot. And then in a flash I

remembered the manner of Lecroix's death, and my imagination blazed with an inspired vision.

I stood up. I believe I shouted at the thing:

"Clear out, you fool! You'll frighten her!"

It was almost as though my absurd little shout had reached the pilot, for the machine zoomed up and turned towards the sea. I watched it grow less and less until it hung like a black dot beyond Ile d'Or. The sound of the engine died away, and I lost all trace of the machine in a film of sea mist.

The possible significance of the aeroplane's flight over the villa never struck me at that moment. I thought it a mere coincidence, and I walked back to the hotel, made tea in my room, and sat reading one of Conrad's novels until it was time to dress for dinner. While I was dressing the lift boy brought me a note. It was from Brander; a curt scrawl:

"Come round and see me after dinner. I want to have a talk."

I took "Conrad" in with me to dinner, and I was growing so accustomed to the "cackling in the hen-roost," as Brander called it, that I could lose myself in a good book and forget the old women. There is no place like an hotel for making one realize what a complete fool the average person is, and my vitality was not sufficiently strong for me to squander it in an attempt to amuse these old people. Call it self-complacency if you will; I prefer to regard it as a reasonable measure of self-defence. I had been sick, and boredom kills the flower of a sick man's renewed interest in life. I kept a good book between me and the antique world of the Grand Hotel, and I have no doubt that the hotel world thought me a conceited boor.

When I strolled round to Brander's villa I found him in the garden, dressed in an old grey flannel suit, his hands deep in his pockets, and a book tucked under his arm.

Even in the dusk I saw that he looked worried. His eyes had a way of growing more prominent when something was working in his big head.

"Hallo! I'm glad you have come."

He climbed the steps and joined me on the terrace, throwing his book down on the round iron table.

"I have just come back from the Villa Morgana. I'm worried."

"What is it?" I asked him

He pushed a chair forward.

"Sonia."

"Something the matter?"

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"I'll tell you."

He lit a cigar, inhaled the smoke, and sat down opposite me.

"I went over there about tea-time, and found her in a most strange state—mentally I mean. She hardly recognized me at first, and she could not talk connectedly. I stayed chatting to her, and she was more herself when I left."

He paused.

"What do you think it was?" I asked him.

"Herrick, it was as though she had been wandering in some other world, that other world, and had received some shock there. When I first saw her she was just coming back to the world we know. The curious part of it was that she did not seem to realize that she was not herself. Now—why?"

"Some shock!"

And then I saw the light.

"Brander, I can tell you something that might account for it. I was on Farfadet this afternoon, and I saw an aeroplane come in from the sea and fly low over the villa."

"An aeroplane?"

He looked at me quickly.

"It circled round several times, and I thought: 'That fellow will frighten her.' Perhaps it was that."

"What time would that be?"

"About three o'clock. You remember you told me how Lecroix was killed. I know how quickly certain things affect one when one has had a mental shock. If the plane came from the aviation ground here, the pilots ought to be warned against flying over the villa."

And then Brander astonished me.

"Supposing he flew there on purpose?" he said; "supposing the pilot and your man of the ilex bush are one and the same?"

I sat there and stared at him.

"But—what on earth—?" I began.

He got up and stood by the steps.

"Let us suppose it—for a moment. If it is so, then—Herrick—we are up against a man with a brain. What has he been thinking? What's his plan? What's his object? What psychological devilry has he conceived?"

"But—good heavens," I said, "what could he gain by frightening her?"

Brander waved an arm.

"Shut up a moment, will you," he said in his brusque way, "I want to think. There is something at the back of my mind, and it won't come out."

Whatever it was, that something would not emerge and we had to work upon the hypothesis that there was a man, and that he had an object and a plan. Brander suggested that I should walk over to the villa

on the following afternoon and call on Sonia Lecroix. If the aeroplane paid the place a second visit, I might be able to see for myself what effect it had upon her.

"Meanwhile," he said, "I'll rummage around."

It was a favourite expression of his, and characteristic of his rautifarious largeness.

The last thing he said to me was: "If the machine comes, and she seems strange, let her alone, man; just sit and watch. And, afterwards, pretend that nothing has happened."

It was one of those serene still days when I walked down through the woods to the Villa Morgana. The trunks of the pipes were splashed with patches of sunlight, and the tops—thickly threaded with black pine-cones—made no movement against the blue of the sky. I entered the grounds of the villa by the gate opening from the Hermitage lane, and half way down the path I met the woman Suzanne.

She was hurrying—head down—and she did not see me until I was close upon her, and then her eyes flashed up at me with a curious, hostile gleam.

"Monsieur—you frightened me."

She hesitated, and showed her teeth in a smile, a smile of concealment.

"Is madame at home?"

She shrugged.

"Perhaps."

She did not offer to go back with me, and I walked on, wondering what she was doing there and why she was in such a hurry. I could see no sign of Sonia when I came to the villa, but while I was hesitating on the steps of the loggia I saw a hand draw back a curtain at one of the French windows.

"It is you!"

She came out to me through the window, and the instant that her eyes met mine I had a feeling that she was glad to see me. A flash of sympathy, and of something more than sympathy, passed between us. The beauty and the mystery of her went straight to my heart. It has always seemed to me that the war had killed the mystery in the young woman of to-day, but in Sonia I discovered it in all its alluring strangeness. She was not of yesterday, to-day, or to-morrow, but a woman of all time, a creature of the deep waters and green woods.

There were two long chairs in the loggia. Madame Lecroix took one, and I the other. The loggia was curtained with wistaria, vines and roses; they climbed the stone pillars and hung from the beams above. Sonia was in black, and this blackness made her skin look like soft white vellum.

"You will have tea with me?"

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"May I?"

She was one of those women who make a man discard his vanity as though he has been caught wearing a loud-coloured tie. I was shy of her, and she smiled at though my shyness amused her. I had a feeling that she let herself relax—that for the moment she was the happy woman seeking herself in the warmth of my admiration. I could not help what was in my eyes. I was at her feet.

"You are better," she told me; "already Le Paradis is doing you good."

I asked her how she knew.

"I can feel it," she said, half closing her eyes. "You bring something with you. An' aura."

"So you believe in an aura?"

She opened her eyes wide.

"Of course! It explains so much. It explains everything."

We talked, and it became very plain to me that she had read and thought much since those convent school-days in Belgium. Once or twice when she was not looking I glanced at my wrist-watch. It was past three o'clock and I wondered whether the angry hum of that wretched aeroplane would break the exquisite tranquillity of that April afternoon. Sonia had begun to make me speak of myself and of my experiences after the war. She seemed to have a most sensitive understanding of the difficulties and the disillusionments of the day, an understanding that astonished me when I remembered the lonely life that she had led. I found myself speaking of intimate personal experiences that I had never confided to anyone else. She understood them at once. She was like a mirror, with a soul in place of the glass.

"I think it all comes," she said, "of living with the wrong people. We were ready to sacrifice everything during the war, but when the war was over the reaction came. Most people went back to the husks of their selfishness."

She was so utterly right that I confessed my surprise.

"You know that?"

"I think I felt it coming before it happened," she said. "Perhaps I was a coward; perhaps I hid myself away from it; but you tried to go on battling, giving yourself as you gave yourself during the war. You were wounded and you bled in a world of flints."

She closed her eyes and lay back, and her dark head on the cerise-coloured cushion made me think of a pink shell enclosing her loveliness. She remained quite still for nearly a minute, and I began to wonder whether I was to witness one of those phases of other-consciousness of which Brander had spoken. I listened for the sound of an aeroplane, but I could

hear nothing but the humming of the bees.

Suddenly she opened her eyes.

"*Mon ami*, do not wound yourself any more. Open the door of your cage."

"You think that selfish?" she went on quickly, and before I could answer her: "But no. We must heal ourselves before we can help others. The hard people do not suffer, and most people are hard. Do not make the mistake of pitying them too much. They will take what you have to give, and give you nothing in return."

We had tea together in the loggia, the woman Suzanne bringing it to us with an air of sulky detachment. She did not look at me, but I felt her hostility and was puzzled by it. Was the woman jealous?

When I got up to go, Sonia rose and walked a little way with me up the path to the Hermitage gate. It seemed to me that we had come very near to each other. I knew that I loved her. To love her seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"Good-bye. It has done me good—talking to you."

I held her hand a moment, and it lay contentedly in mine.

"May I come again?"

"When you please."

I was half-way to Le Paradis before I remembered the aeroplane and the almost fantastic plot it had suggested.

When I returned to the hotel the concierge brought me a letter. It was from Brander.

"We are going to dine to-night at the Hotel Jeanne d'Arc. Call for me at my villa at about quarter to seven."

I went up to my room to dress.

Brander was ready and waiting for me when I called for him, and we walked down through the Jardin St. Louis to the Rue Thiers where the Jeanne d'Arc stood. I soon realized that Brander had been "rummaging around." That large common sense of his showed in his method.

The officers of the nth Infantry Regiment dined twice a week at the Jeanne d'Arc, and it appeared that the flying-men of the aviation school also had a mess there. The Jeanne d'Arc was a provincial and purely French hotel; it did not cater for tourists, and everybody—officers and civilians—dined together in the *salle-à-manger*. The infantry mess had a long table of its own; the aviation school dined by itself in the corner of the window.

I shall never forget the long, bare room with its unpolished floor, and its smell that suggested wine, sawdust, and a faint odour of garlic. Its walls were distem-

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pered a pale blue, and painted with festoons of pink roses. The walls looked fly-blown and dirty, and the flies themselves played a little planetary system round the electric lights, or cruised separately about the room. They crawled over the tables and over the rolls of bread; they settled on your head with exasperating regularity. Each table was decorated with an aspidistra in a glazed pot. The lay mess-table boasted two of these melancholy plants. I noticed that the silver looked tarnished, but the tablecloths and napkins were clean.

Brander had reserved a table at the far end of the room. We were early, and our only companion was a commercial traveller who was reading a Marseilles paper and picking his teeth with a match. Brander placed me with my face towards the door. "If you recognize your man," he said, "tread on my foot."

The room began to fill. A fat waiter—stertorous and blue nosed—arrived with the wine list, and breathed hard on the top of Brander's head. The officers of the nth came in twos and threes and took their places at the long table. One or two men in mufti wandered to their seats at the aviation table. The potage appeared—thin pea soup with flat pieces of stale bread floating in it. I had picked up my spoon, when I saw a little dark man enter the room and make his way towards the aviators' table.

I trod on Brander's foot.

He glanced round in a slow, dispassionate and casual way. My man of the ilex bush was pulling back a chair before sitting down. Someone made a remark to him, and his red upper lip lifted in a smile.

Brander returned to his soup.

"That's it, is it?" he said with an air of indifference.

I nodded.

"I don't like it. And I have not seen it before."

The room filled and grew noisy. Brander and I talked and made a show of being absorbed in eating our dinner. He nodded and smiled at one or two of the officers whom he knew, and at the close of the meal a tall fair man, with the rank-badges of a captain, came across to us and spoke to Brander.

Brander introduced us.

"Monsieur Herrick—le Capitaine Beauregard. Sit down, Beauregard, and have a liqueur with me."

The Frenchman drew up a chair at our table and sat down.

Brander was popular with other men; he was like a big dog with smiling eyes and a stately good temper; smaller men might yap, and the big dog was quite undisturbed. I liked Beauregard from the

first glance; he was one of those blond, clear-eyed Frenchmen, a little reserved, pithy, long limbed and clean. He came from the north, and his temper was Nordic.

Brander offered him a cigar, and we sat and chatted. There was so much noise now that you could have talked scandal and no one would have heard you. Even the flies grew more active and vivacious. I used my napkin as a swish.

My French was not of the best, and I could not follow all that Brander and Beauregard said to each other, but I gathered that Brander had manoeuvred for a gossip whose ultimate object was my friend of the ilex bush. I understood them better when I saw Beauregard turn in his chair and glance towards the aviators' table.

"*La moustache noir?*" he asked.

"*Oui. Quelle ville?*"

"*C'est Paul Decugis.*"

Beauregard gave an expressive twitch of the shoulders, and I saw little hard crystals of light form in his blue eyes. His antipathy strained at the leash. He did not like the man any better than we did.

"Decugis—Decugis!" said Brander softly, as though searching his memory; "not Paul Decugis—the famous ace?"

Beauregard nodded. Then he broke into slang which I did not understand, but it made Brander laugh.

"*Un élégant!*" You are like me, Beauregard; you do not love a man whose head is swollen."

"It makes me wish to play football."

"Exactly."

We chatted for another twenty minutes before Beauregard returned to his own people, and Brander and I rose to go. Decugis was still at his table, his chair tilted on its hind legs; a cigarette stuck with a *dégagé* air in the corner of his red mouth. He glanced at us casually, and with a sort of amiable insolence that had become natural to him, and if our presence in the *salle-à-manger* of the Jeanne d'Arc had any significance for him he did not betray it by showing any interest in us.

Brander slipped his hand under my arm when we reached the street.

"You are sure of your man, Dick?"

"Absolutely."

"Do you realize who he is?"

"Decugis—the aviator."

Brander's fingers contracted on the muscles of my arm.

"One of the best fighters the French had. He is an instructor now at the aviation school. During the war he belonged to the 13th Squadron."

"An unlucky number!"

"The 13th was Lecroix's squadron. Doesn't that link things up a little?"

The Ace of Hearts

V

We went round to Brander's villa and talked. He had two English arm-chairs in his sitting-room, and we pulled them up to the window—and turned off the electric light. There is something crude and superficial about electric light, and Brander would have none of it; the stars shining in the blue-black sky and the flashing yellow of Ile d'Or were more in keeping with his subtle appreciation of life.

It was Brander who did most of the talking, and his deep voice seemed to match the darkness.

"Let's take the facts," he said, "and then try to evolve our theory. Decugis knew Lecroix; he knew all about Lecroix's death; it is probable that he knows a good deal about Sonia's life since her husband's death. It is possible that he made advances—and was badly rebuffed. His ingenuity was challenged. Let's assume that he is using his wits. If so—what does it mean?"

"To put it crudely—" I began; but Brander swept me aside.

"Oh, yes; there may be crude motives at the back of it all; but the truth seems to be that, at the moment, the fellow sees farther than we do. And that is impertinent."

He seemed to grind himself more deeply into his chair.

"Now—what about an obsession? Let's assume that Sonia has an obsession. What is it? What might it be?"

"I think she believes in life after death."

"Certainly. So do I. But what sort of life?"

"The actual presence of the spirits of the dead?"

Brander puffed smoke.

"Supposing," he said slowly, "supposing that she was obsessed by the idea that Lecroix is haunting her. Let's assume it. How would he arrive to her? How—might he arrive to her? As she imagined him just before his death—"

"In an aeroplane—a ghost plane."

Brander sat up.

"By Gad!" he said, and I saw his fists clenched under his chin. "Of course! Isn't that logical in a way? It accounts for the extraordinary effect Decugis's flight over the villa had on her. The point is: did he count on producing the effect; and if so, does he know that he produced it?"

"There is that woman."

"Suzanne?"

I told him my impression of Suzanne, and his figure seemed to stiffen.

"All right. Let's assume collusion; that Decugis has the woman in his pocket. She watches the effect that his plane has on

Sonia, and reports to him. What next, Dick?"

I think we both jumped simultaneously to that last level of vision, for we sat in silence for some seconds. Then Brander moved uneasily in his chair. I saw his hands grip the arms of it as though the vital part of him were reaching out to grip and crush an invisible enemy.

"Good Lord!" he said, "and that's the conclusion! If the man has conceived it, he is a devil. And there is a flash of genius in him, too. Our affair is obvious."

"To make sure?"

"Exactly."

He shook the ash from his cigar.

"Herrick, we have got to see for ourselves this—what shall I call it?—mesmerism by machinery! He did not fly to-day. He may do so to-morrow."

"Three o'clock," I said, understanding his meaning.

"Both of us. Call for me here at two."

It was past midnight when I got to bed.

We were in a silent mood when we strolled over to the Villa Morgana, and I know that my own thoughts were concentrated on what might happen that afternoon. I shrank from the idea of seeing Sonia in some humiliation of mental defeat—her real self surrendered and in bondage. I imagined a nakedness in the stripping off of her sensitive conscious self; the self that hides so much; the delicate veil of the ego. I confess that I was afraid, if this shrinking of mine could be called fear. Ask a lover if he has ever pictured the skeleton of the woman he loves stripped of the skin and flesh, and he will look at you with horror and with scorn; well, it seemed to me that I might see Sonia's soul stripped of skin and flesh; that I might be shown the organs and the bare bones of it; and my fastidiousness and my love rebelled. It would be a damnable piece of sacrilege, humiliating.

There was a wind blowing, and it made a restless stirring in the pines. I found myself listening, trying to disentangle some other sound from the noise of the wind in the trees, and when I glanced at Brander I thought I saw the same listening look in his eyes. He was curiously taciturn. Once he stopped dead and stared at the sky.

"I wonder if—that—was the first time?"

I did not catch his meaning.

"Decugis's flight over there," he explained, with a thrust of the arm.

There was something so sinister in the suggestion that I felt angry. Why could not Brander keep his imagination under control?

"Nothing has happened," I said obstinately; "it can't have happened."

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We walked on, pretending to be absorbed in avoiding the loose stones in the lane; but I think we were shy of each other and of the thought that dominated us both. Our first glimpse of the sea was of an intense blueaess swelling above the tossing tops of a grove of palms. We loitered along the path till we reached the gate in the wall. Brander went in first.

"Unbutton that face of yours," he said, with a glance at me as we turned up under the cypresses.

I laughed. It was the sort of laughter one indulges in before going into action.

If we men were a little too grim we found our contrast in Sonia Lecroix. She was lying on one of the long chairs in the loggia, reading, and she sat up and waved her book at us. Never had I seen her more normal; less the woman upon whom life was playing mysterious tricks. I noticed that she looked at Brander more often than she looked at me; but when her eyes did touch me, it was with a little glimmer of inward light—like a sun-ray playing in a wood.

"How irrelevant you are!"

She smiled at Brander as he pulled up a chair and sat down.

"I would prefer to be called a paradox."

She laughed noiselessly.

"Imagine a paradox with a beard! I should imagine that masculine irrelevancy is always bearded."

"Is that a subtle compliment to Herrick?"

"Oh, no! But I think that the clean-shaven man acknowledges the feminine element in himself. A man should have streaks of femininity."

"Let the blame rest on my ancestors," said Brander; "they mismanaged things."

We were struck by her spirit of playfulness, and commented on it afterwards to each other. Her sky had no cloud; but out of the other sky came that sudden menacing hum—the distant roar of an aeroplane. We were instantly alert, watching her, even while we pretended to lounge and trifle. I noticed a little wrinkle as of pain flicker up on Sonia's forehead. She sat listening. Her attention wandered from us. Almost she had the appearance of a woman who is bored.

The aeroplane was coming in from the sea, and the sound of its engine grew louder and more menacing. Brander was talking hard. I became aware of a rigidity in Sonia's figure; her eyes were dilated, and there was a faint flicker of redness in the big black pupils. She remained utterly still. Her eyes looked through and beyond us. She had ceased to bear any part in the conversation; I doubt whether she heard our voices.

Brander made a sign to me as the plane came roaring over the villa. I felt and saw its shadow passing, and I was conscious of that queer organic thrill in me—the sense of something catastrophic hovering in the immediate future. I saw Sonia shrink, and it was like the crouching of a bird in the grass. Each time the plane roared over the house she made that little movement as of crouching.

I felt a sudden rage against the man up there. I jumped up and made for the steps of the loggia, but Brander pulled me back.

"You idiot! Sit down!"

I saw something like fear in his eyes. I had never imagined that Brander could look afraid. I sat down, curiously ashamed.

At that moment Sonia began to speak, and we realized that the Sonia whom we knew was very far away from us. We listened to another woman, felt ourselves in the presence of some other personality, or of a subconscious self suddenly and awesomely naked. I am not a psychologist, and I do not know how else to describe it; but I do know that it frightened me; yet filled me with a most extraordinary tenderness, a passionate pity.

"Pierre," she said; "Pierre!"

Now Pierre was the name of her dead husband, of that Lecroix who had fallen like a flaming torch out of heaven. My eyes met Brander's; we both had realized how pregnant was that one word. But Sonia was speaking again in a little complaining, weary voice:

"Am I to have no rest? Have I not done everything? I gave you forgiveness when your other body was burnt."

That infernal plane came booming low over the house, and she put up her two hands as though mutely appealing.

"Pierre—you frighten me. It has been so quiet, so very quiet. Why must you come back for me—with that—with that?"

She wept, and it was amazing and tragic to see the other consciousness of her shedding tears. She looked to me like a sleeping child agonized by some dream.

"What is that you want? What do you wish me to do? Must I surrender a second time? No, I will not go with you; it is impossible! Oh, mother—mother!"

I felt that I could not stand it much longer; that I wanted to kill the man who was torturing this woman whom I had begun to love. I glanced at Brander and his face astonished me, for it was a bit of granite, the eyes set in a stone. He appeared to be watching something as a dog watches something that is invisible to his master, and then I realized that his eyes were fixed on the open window behind Sonia's chair. I could see nothing but the edge of a curtain and the curved back of a

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gilded settee; the rest of the room was all deep shadow.

Suddenly I became conscious of a sense of infinite relief. The throb of the plane's engine was growing less and less, and I realized that Decugis was heading away over the sea. The sound became no more than the humming of a gnat, and I saw Sonia's body gradually relax until she lay back with her head on the cushion. I glanced at Brander. He held up a hand that bade me be still.

And so we sat and watched her everyday, self steal gradually back to her. At first she seemed asleep; presently there was a flickering of the eyelids, a closing and unclosing of the hands.

"Talk, Dick. Keep it up. She must not know."

He began to talk in a steady, cheerful voice, picking up the conversation at the point where it had been interrupted, and my respect for Brander was never so great as at that moment. I continued to play up to him; but I was a rather jerky and uncertain second fiddle.

"You know, Herrick, you can never get back at your ancestors. They are people who played a sort of practical joke on us, and we have no way of retorting. Of course, you can edit your great-grandfather's memoirs and show him up as a rather scurvy old rascal—but even then—"

I managed to laugh.

"I don't see that you have much to complain of."

"My point is," and he edged his chair a little to one side, "that they mismanaged certain important details. Of course, that is part of the joke; but I dare say that Sonia will tell us—"

She had opened her eyes. Brander was smiling, and she answered his smile.

"Your poor ancestors!" she said languidly.

"Herrick is inclined to side with those dead fogies."

She had a slight frown on her forehead as though conscious of some clouding of her thoughts.

"We abuse what we do not understand."

"But can anybody believe that Herrick can understand my ancestors!"

In ten minutes she was talking as though nothing had happened, and I realized that she remembered nothing—absolutely nothing—of her passing into that other world. It amazed me. I was still under the spell of that great astonishment when Brander rose to go. She gave me her hand, and when I touched it I found it very cold.

"I am going to take Herrick home over the top of Farfadet."

She glanced from Brander to me.

"Must he climb Farfadet?" she asked. "I am not quite so decrepit as all that," I broke in.

And then Brander marched me away. We did not go very far. He sat down under a stone-pine just beyond the half-acre of red soil where old François grew his vines.

"Well—what next?"

I answered his question with another.

"Why were you watching that window?"

"Because I saw something. Did you?"

"Nothing."

"When a curtain moves in a certain way, just when there happens to be no wind, you may infer that a door has been opened and closed. The woman Suzanne was in that room."

"Spying!"

Brander nodded.

"She wears black, you know; but she had not thought of muffling up her face in a shawl. I had just one glimpse of her face."

This suggestion of Suzanne's treachery was like the last straw added to an accumulation of stresses, and my temper gave way.

"This has got to be stopped; I don't care what methods we use."

He had picked up a pine-cone and was pulling it to pieces with an air of leisurely detachment.

"What kind of methods?" he asked, without looking up.

"Sack the woman—and settle with Decugis."

"How?"

He looked up at me, and I found his calm eyes rather exasperating. I must confess that I had no definite plan, and that too was exasperating.

"Dick," he went on, "the situation is rather delicate; it can't be attacked with rough-and-tumble methods. At least, I don't think so. The obvious thing for us to do is to find out whether there is a place where Decugis and his machine can land."

I gave him a quick look.

"It will come to that?"

"Don't you see it? Any day. He must follow the scheme up; drop down like a hawk while the prey is still fascinated."

"Hell!" I said. "If I have to shoot Decugis—"

Brander rose in his slow, large way and took me by the elbow.

"Oh, bosh, man! We shall use our wits, and leave cinema stunts to the fools."

We explored the ground in the neighbourhood of the villa, and presently we came upon a little stretch of flat grassland surrounded by groves of olives. Brander scanned it, with his thumb and forefinger fretting in his beard.

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"Well, what about it? You ought to know."

"It's too small," I said.

"Sure?"

I reconsidered my verdict.

"No, perhaps I'm wrong. These new planes are very quick off the ground. It could be done."

"Let's measure it. Remember, Decugis is an expert."

We paced out the length of the grass-land.

"Yes, I think it could be done."

Brander seemed satisfied.

"One of us will have to be here when it is done," he said; "that will be the next cog in our wheel."

VI

It was plain to us both that we had certain very definite facts to go upon.

"There was no doubt about the obsession," Brander said to me as we climbed slowly up the stony path that led over Farfadet; "but the point is, what use will Decugis make of it? Of course, that woman tells him everything."

It occurred to me that they must have arranged a signal code, and we discussed its possibilities.

"He will have to be sure that Sonia is alone before he makes his landing, and you can be pretty certain that Suzanne will show some sort of signal, say—a white sheet or tablecloth spread out in some conspicuous place."

"I wonder whether he suspects us of guessing his game, or thinks us fools?"

"A man of Decugis's temper suspects everybody."

"We shall have to count on his altering the time of his flights. Suzanne will warn him that we are at the villa about four. He'll come later."

Brander agreed with me. We had reached the crest of Farfadet and we sat down on the grass, with all that smiling world spread under the calm eyes of the evening. The distant islands and the headlands were flushed with a soft, rosy light that merged into pearl grey; they looked strangely ethereal and unsubstantial, almost diaphanous, like masses of coloured vapour. This Provençal world had a wonderful atmosphere. It made one think of the dawn of history, of Homeric fantasies, enchanted seas, the Islands of the Hesperides, heroes in sable ships, blind Polyphemus hurling rocks, Calypso making the stars tremble with her sighs.

We sat and dreamed.

"And they would say it never could happen!"

I turned to Brander. He was sitting with his elbows on his knees, his big head tilted slightly backwards, his eyes amused yet infinitely wise.

"The stodgy people?"

"They expect a great noise—you know, Herrick; and then they expect to see it in the daily paper, head-lines, and all that! I wonder how many people knew how quiet the war was; quiet—I mean—in its human action?"

"It was quiet," I said; "and, somehow, you were never surprised. Things just happened."

"Just happened!" And he smiled. "But that's life—life spilling over and making itself felt. Now what about this affair of ours; this affair which no stodgy person would believe in?"

"There is a thing we call sanity, Dick; a certain average way of reaching to life's affairs. In Sonia, I see, it is a little bit of white cloud clinging to the top of a mountain. It might melt—blow away."

"If Decugis is not discouraged?"

"No; but if we discourage him too clumsily. It is we who might supply the shock—the wind to scatter that bit of cloud."

Then I made the clumsiest of suggestions:

"Would a doctor-man be of any use?"

And then Brander laughed—laughed as though I had sprung a divine jest on him.

"Oh, my lad! A bottle of physic! Or even a little dose of mild suggestion. Some solemn person in pince-nez! Much better call in Homer or Old Nick."

"I may be a confounded fool!"

"Not a bit of it. But haven't you any sort of impulse? I'm groping down in the depths of myself, trying to get hold of that elemental inspiration, the answer that Nature has ready somewhere. Can't you supply it?"

I turned over on my stomach, and lay with my chin on my crossed wrists.

"What sort of answer? It is up to us to break that obsession of hers; to prevent Decugis from using it. Isn't that the idea?"

He nodded.

"I'm getting there," he said presently; "something is coming."

I pulled a grass stem and chewed the end of it.

"Dick," he said suddenly.

"Well?"

"Supposing you were to use the obsession; cut in and play Decugis at his own game?"

I rolled over and stared at him.

"You mean—"

"Get hold of a plane and swoop in ahead of him. That is the idea I have been groping for."

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I had a strange feeling of darkness within me, something that was like shame.

"I haven't the nerve," I said.

He did not answer me for a moment.

"Perhaps—some event—will supply you with the necessary nerve."

I suspected him of sarcasm, and I was angry; but I was soon to realize the depth and the subtlety of his inspiration.

Assuming that Decugis would attempt a descent on the grassland among the olives, it was agreed between us that we would watch the villa in turn, each of us taking an afternoon. I must confess that my visualizing of what might happen was very vague and uncertain, and I had no fore-feeling of what I was to see or to suffer. I left Le Paradis about two o'clock, and taking a path that led over one of the lower spurs of Farfadet, I reached the wire fence that formed the boundary of Sonia's wilderness on the side towards the hills. There was a belt of pines here sheltering the house and garden from the north; the fence was easily climbed, and I sat down under the pine trees and waited for the coming of Decugis's aeroplane.

I had been there three hours, and was persuaded that the afternoon was going to prove uneventful, when I heard the distant hum of the plane's engine. The hands of my watch stood at ten minutes past six, and Brander had told me that old François left his work at six and trudged back to his cottage on the lower slopes of Farfadet. A tremor of excitement ran down my spine. I followed the belt of pines until I reached a thicket of stunted evergreen oaks close to the olive groves that surrounded Decugis's hypothetical landing-stage, and here I hid myself in the scrub.

As usual, Decugis flew his machine in circles over the villa, sometimes swooping so low that he almost touched the house. After ten minutes of this hawk's play, he shut off his engine, and I realized that he was coming down. He made a perfect landing on the grass between the olive groves, the blue biplane coming to rest so quickly that he had thirty yards of clear ground between him and the trees. I watched him climb out of the pilot's seat. He was wearing a leather coat and helmet that made him look like a big bronze beetle. His movements were quick and alert; but they were not the movements of a man who was flustered. He left the machine and disappeared among the grey trunks of the olives, and I gave him a minute's "law" before breaking cover and following him towards the villa. I was extraordinarily cautious, for it was essential that he should not discover that he was being watched.

Beyond the olive groves lay the vineyard, and beyond the vineyard a winding path cut through a tangle of tree-heath and yellow broom to the open space in front of the villa. I was half-way down this path when I heard a man's voice calling Madame Lecroix by name:

"Sonia; Sonia."

Pushing into the tangle of growth, I slowly worked my way forward until I had a view of that open space—rough grass, still purpled with orchids and anemones. Wild hedges of red Provencal roses caught the evening sunlight as it slanted through the trees. And into this pool of colour and of interplay of lights and shadows the white steps of the loggia descended like steps into some still pool.

Sonia was standing on those steps. She seemed to dream with wide-open eyes that looked like two circles of unseeing shadow. Her figure appeared to me both rigid and flexible, like a statue endowed with the power of movement. She came slowly down the steps and paused on the edge of the grass, and my glance went to that other figure—that figure in leather that stood waiting for her; a thing of bronze in the glow of the sunset.

I can describe only what I saw. Its effect upon me was so elemental yet so complex, and also so ugly, that I prefer to leave it in the limbo of things that are better forgotten. For perhaps half a minute the two figures remained absolutely still and about twenty yards apart. I guessed that Decugis was willing her to come to him; that she was in a state of trance and open to suggestion.

Quite suddenly she moved and went slowly across the grass towards him. I saw Decugis's face in profile; a voracious and exultant face that smiled; and the thought came into my head: "If he touches her I shall kill him." It was followed by a second thought: "If you wake her with violence—what will happen?"

I remained where I was, feeling most damnably helpless, and conscious of a sense of savage shame. Sonia was standing close to Decugis, facing him in an attitude of languid and obedient expectancy—an expectancy in which there was neither surprise nor emotion. I suppose that other consciousness of her's imagined itself in the presence of Pierre Lecroix. I was so absorbed, for the moment, in watching her that I forgot to look at Decugis's face; but when I did remember to look at it, the expression on it shocked me. The soul of the man showed there, naked and unashamed.

I saw him lay his hands upon her shoulders. She did not resist, nor did she respond.

"*Ma chérie.*"

His right hand moved—caressed her neck, took the lobe of her ear between thumb and forefinger, and pinched it with a suggestion of tender playfulness. He was experimenting. Then, very slowly, he drew her closer until her face was near to his. She did not resist. Her eyes looked obedient and blind.

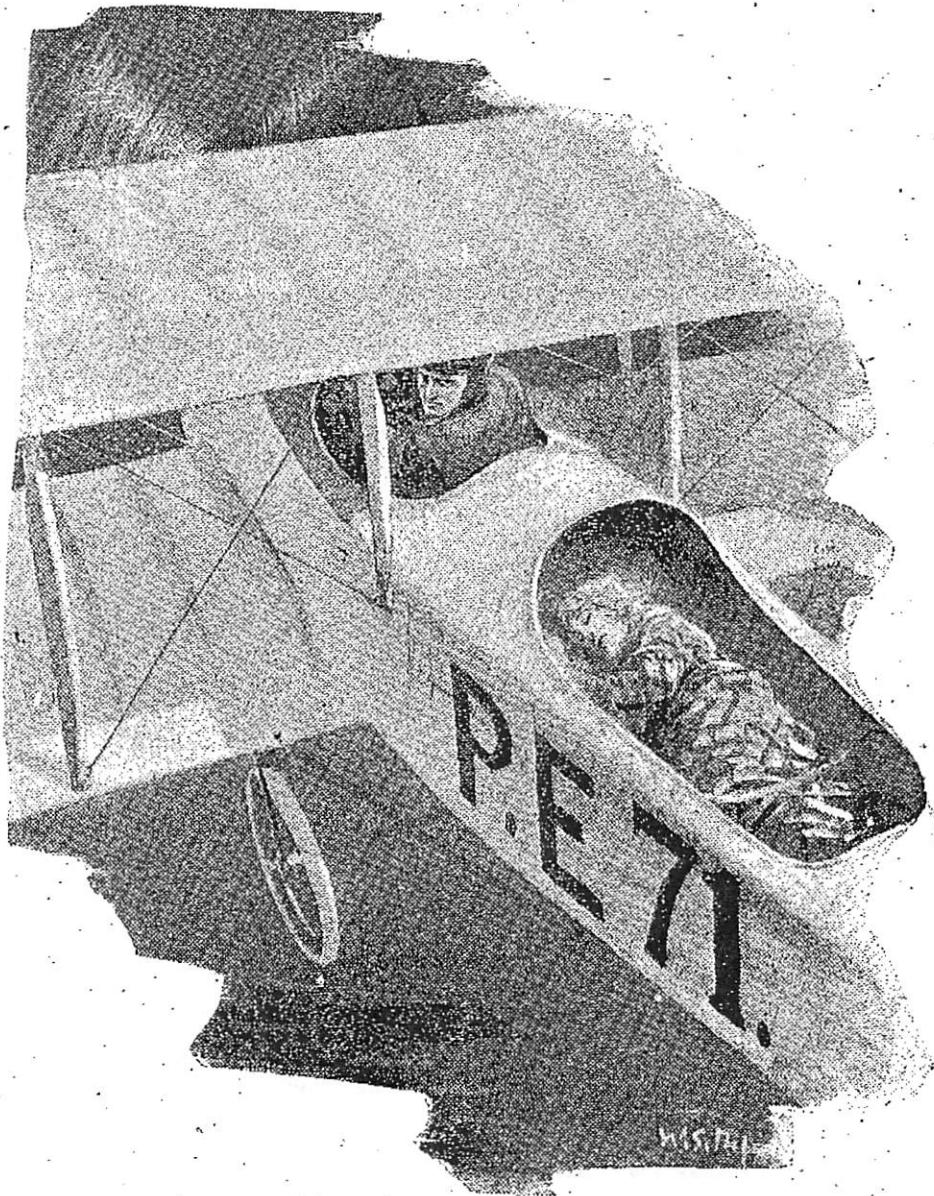
I lost my nerve for the moment and crouched down among the bushes, trembling with an anger that was helpless and humiliating, and when I made myself look at them again, Decugis had Sonia in his arms. He was kissing her, and she was taking his kisses as a statue might have taken them.

And then I was made to realize that this man was something of an epicure in the matter of the emotions. He had learnt the restraint that holds back in order to enjoy. He knew how to dally even with his own passions; to sip the wine, to smell the flower, to touch the warm velvet of her with delicate exultation. Perhaps, too, he was clever, cautious in his experimental passion. He wished to make sure of dominating her completely; to return and prove his power over her day by day.

For presently he let her go and pointed to the house.

"Good night, *chérie.*"

She turned like an obedient child and walked back across the grass to the villa, and Decugis watched her until she reached the steps of the loggia. I ducked down among the shrubs and heard his footsteps



I had done a mad thing, and even then I did not realize how mad it was, or where the madness might end.

go by within three yards of me, and for the moment I thought of rushing out at him. Something—the thought of Brander's anxiety—held me back. My recklessness had a more subtle and audacious inspiration. I even went and watched him with the curiosity of a rival and a fellow expert. He pulled the plane round by one wing, spun the propeller until his engine started, climbed in and cleared the olives by twenty feet.

VII

BRANDER told me afterwards that he knew what had happened when he caught sight of my face as I entered his room. "It has come back to you," he said to me; "I thought that your nerve would come back."

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I sat down in one of his big chairs, and he reached over and passed me his cigar-box. I smoked as one used to smoke sometimes during the bad hours of the war—savagely, feverishly, without the nicotine having the least effect.

"My nerve has come back all right," I said, and then I told him what had happened; but not quite everything, for I could not bear to speak, even to Brander, of some of the things that I had seen.

He sat deep in his chair, watching me with his shrewd eyes, and there was calmness about the man that made the wild intervention that he had suggested seem logical and true. It did not even astonish me that I should be sitting there in that French room discussing the most fantastic adventure: the battle of flying men for the love and the soul of a woman. And yet, after all, it was no more than the old tale modernized; romance in a twentieth-century setting; Lochinvar handling a biplane instead of straddling a horse.

"Are you up to the strain of it?" Brander asked me; "I'm not worrying about anything else."

I told him that when a man had seen what I had seen he was equal to flying over the moon.

"You see, I love her," I said; "it has happened that way."

He nodded. Those simple words of mine seemed as inevitable to him as they were to me.

"That settles it. We will motor over to Le Drapeau early to-morrow morning. I know Aubert, who is in charge of the aerodrome there. His company has brought out that new machine, the Etoile II."

"But will they let a stranger fly one of their machines?"

"Dear lad, I am not too old to spin them a yarn. Remember you are a managing-director of Vigall and Black; you have heard of the Etoile II, and want to try her before making a commercial proposal. They'll hire you a machine all right. Of course, you will have to spend a day or two at Le Drapeau."

"What for?"

"Well, is not a new machine rather like a new horse? Besides—they may insist on your having a little coaching before you go up alone."

"That's the point," I said; "will they let me go up alone?"

Brander smiled.

"Mr. Herrick will be introduced by the English Vice-Consul. He may have to exercise a little ingenuity in order to get away without an observer!"

"I have done it before," I said. "Meanwhile, what about the Villa Morgana?"

Brander was prepared for that.

"I shall drive back directly I have fixed you up at Le Drapeau. You can leave the Villa Morgana to me."

There are some men who carry a plan through with an inevitableness that reminds one of the precision of a machine. Brander was the least mechanical of men; but in the matter of psychology and in the handling of human nature he showed an almost supernatural cleverness that was inspired, I believe, by a wonderful intuition. It was interesting to watch him manipulate Monsieur Aubert, of the Compagnie d'Etoile, a florid and rather truculent Frenchman, with a hard blue eye and an aggressive jaw. Brander was all *bon-homie*; serene and easy friendliness. He managed to convey the impression that he was conferring a delicate and personal favour upon both of us by introducing Monsieur Aubert to the managing-director of Vigall and Black.

But to begin with, Monsieur Aubert would have nothing to do with us. Like most Frenchmen, he was feeling rather sore against the English. The rate of exchange and the coal question rankled.

"Impossible," he said, "quite impossible."

Brander shrugged his shoulders, smiled, remarked that it was a pity, and began to talk about something else. But he came back to the point, touching upon it half humorously, using just a little flattery, suggesting that the commercial proposition might have proved very promising. "Besides, Monsieur Herrick was one of our experts during the war. He has brought down innumerable Boches."

I confess that I stood there suffering inward rages, trying to look mildly at the man who was sitting on the soul of my adventure. And yet I was astonished when he began to show signs of being persuaded. He was very cautious, and I suppose the French are the most cautious and the most suspicious people in the world. I backed Brander up with a broad hint as to some future commercial arrangement. Aubert said that I might look at one of the machines, and their pet pilot might even take me for a trial flight.

I asked him if I might try the machine myself, after a little instruction.

He grinned and shook his head, and from the look that Brander gave me I guessed that this was Monsieur Aubert's preparation for saying "yes."

There was a shabby little hotel at Le Drapeau, and when Brander left me there, he made a characteristic remark:

"If you can't manage it now—you are no soldier."

"I'll manage it," I said.

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By Warwick Deeping

"Any idea what you are going to do?"
"If I got away alone with the machine?"
"Yes, after that."
"I shall fly over there."
"And then?"

I had to confess that I had not the slightest idea; and he looked at me in his queer, deep way.

"No plan?"

"I'm leaving it to instinct. I have a notion that I shall get my inspiration." Brander buttoned up his coat.

"Perhaps it's as well," he said. "Yes, leave it to instinct. It does not do to be too clever in these affairs of the heart!"

I need not describe all that happened at Le Drapeau, or how I chummed up with Criqui, their pet pilot, who introduced me to Etoile II.

He went up in the observer's seat with me, and after a little careful cruising, I found that I could handle the Etoile with perfect confidence.

Criqui was pleased.

"Ot stuff!" he said, in his crude English.

I laughed.

"I should like to take her up again tomorrow on my own, but your Monsieur Aubert—"

Criqui made a grimace. He had an immense contempt for Aubert, the flat-foot, the man of commerce, the earth-bug, as he called him.

"Aubert—finis—two days," he said.

And that is how it came about that I got away alone with Etoile II about four o'clock on a golden April afternoon. I was in great heart, and as exultant as a boy, but behind all my exultation lay a sort of fear, an immense curiosity, a puzzling sense of vagueness as to what I had to do. My mind was a bit fogged, but it was not the mind part of me that was needed.

I had been in the air less than half an hour when I sighted the familiar outlines of Tête Noir and Ile d'Or. It occurred to me that Décugis might be out on the same adventure, but I did not worry about Décugis, and I headed for the villa under the slopes of Farfadet, and coming down to within three hundred feet, played round in great circles. I had lost all my "nerves," and was quite confident of hitting off that landing among the olives.

I sighted the open ground. Décugis's plane was not there, and I straightened out, shut off my engine and came down with an easy glide.

I was putting the machine round ready for restarting when Brander came upon me suddenly from among the olives, and I stood and stared at him like a helpless fool. I think that Brander understood.

His face had a queer, glowing solemnity above the blackness of his beard.

"Herrick! What the devil are you waiting for?"

I felt his fierceness tingling in my blood.

"She's there," he went on. "Décugis was here yesterday. He—"

I understood. Something flared up in me, that exuberant, passionate life that seemed to have deserted me when I touched the earth. I gave Brander a jerk of the head, and went down through the wilderness to the villa.

From that moment, in any ordinary self-conscious sense I was not myself; I was inspired. Sonia was there, waiting on the steps for me, and I found myself holding her hands and looking into eyes that were like darkened windows, for the mystic curtains were drawn across her soul. She did not know me any more than she had known Décugis.

I led her up through the olives, and she came like a dreaming child. Brander was not to be seen. And there I took Sonia in my arms, lifted her up, and placed her in the body of the machine. I strapped her into the observer's seat, covered her with a heavy rug that I had brought, and spun the propeller and started the engine. Two minutes later we were soaring over the sea.

I had done a mad thing—and even then I did not realize how mad it was, or where the madness might end. Blind instinct seemed to be working in me. I had to carry Sonia away, away from herself, from the obsession of Lecroix's imagined spirit, from the fog of Décugis's inspired devilry. But where was I taking her?

The introspective part of me soon had the hatches shut down on it, for a moment later I sighted that other plane, a dot tinged with a faint blueness hanging above the ridge of Tête Noir. I guessed at once that it was Décugis. I had forestalled him, but that was all.

I wondered whether he would suspect the truth, or whether the woman Suzanne would be able to show him any sort of signal that would put him wise as to what had happened. I guessed that she had been watching—and that she knew. And soon I saw his machine turn towards the sea, and I guessed that he was after me.

As I brought the Etoile round again my eyes caught the grey blue outline of Ile d'Or. I knew the island very slightly; it was thinly wooded, with one or two grassy plateaux sloping gently towards the sea. There were a few small farms on the island—the cultivated ground lying about the houses that were scattered along the lower slopes of the hills. I headed the Etoile for Ile d'Or, giving her all the kick that was in

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her engine. I knew that Decugis was after me, and I wanted to make that island two minutes ahead of him, for those two minutes would be very precious.

As a matter of fact the Etoile proved faster than his machine, and I was spared the miserable experience of feeling him sitting on my tail. I seemed to cover the blue and silver of the sea in one great gliding rush. He d'Or heaved up under me, I saw it like a model, with Sonia lying just behind me as though asleep, her hair all blown about her face, tremulous hair that seemed to flutter about my heart.

As I spiralled down towards the island I caught a glimpse of Decugis's machine well away over the sea. A little whimper of exultation went through me. But all my wits were now concentrated on picking out a landing place, one of those lonely, grassy plateaux where the slope was not too sharp. As I came down I spotted a likely place running green and flat along the edge of a pine-wood, and I fixed on it as my landing stage. Climbing out, I found Decugis still a mile or more away, for which mercy I thanked my God.

For I had my plan now. It had come to me suddenly as I was planning down, and I think it must have blown to me out of Sonia's tremulous hair. I unstrapped her. She appeared to be in a state of trance, and when I lifted her out and carried her to the wood she lay in my arms as though asleep. There was a big, old flat-topped pine on the edge of the wood, with a mass of resinous undergrowth growing under it and making a sort of natural hedge. I laid Sonia in the shelter of the undergrowth, went back for the rug, and covered her with it. She was hidden there.

I went back to the Etoile, took the tool-bag out of the locker, and became very busy unscrewing and inspecting the sparking plugs. I was wondering what Decugis would do. I knew that he had been too far away to distinguish what I was doing when I had carried Sonia into the wood.

He was very close now. He circled round once or twice, and then shut off his engine and came down. His machine landed within twenty yards of the Etoile, but I gave it a mere casual glance and went on with my pottering.

Decugis climbed down and came across to me. He was smiling, and showing a red mouth very full of teeth. I had made up my mind to try bluffing him, but if my bluffing failed I would use something else to keep him away from Sonia.

"In trouble, monsieur?"

He came round and stood close to me—his sharp eyes running all over the Etoile.

"I'm having a look round—that's all," I said.

I went on with my pottering. He stood and fidgeted, and then strolled round the Etoile as though he were interested in her.

He came back.

"From Le Drapau, eh?"

I nodded.

"Do you find her pleasant to handle, monsieur?"

"Very."

Then he tried a shot at me.

"Your passenger was a little nervous, perhaps?"

I gave him an uncomprehending stare; I was rather proud of that stare, but I did not know my Decugis.

"Passenger! What passenger?"

He grinned.

"I thought that you had someone with you, monsieur."

"You have an imagination!"

He dawdled about, pretending to try to light a cigarette.

"One gets ideas into one's head," he said with an air of casual candour; "I could have sworn that you had an observer with you."

"An optical delusion, monsieur."

He tried a third match on his cigarette, but the match went out. Now there was hardly any wind.

"Tiens!" he looked amazed, "I'll get a light over there."

He started towards the pine-wood, and then I saw his game.

"Monsieur!"

My voice had a nasty, rasping edge to it, but he whipped round and came back smiling.

"So there was a passenger, monsieur!"

"I beg your pardon!"

"And a lady."

He was standing quite close to me and looking at me with sly insolence.

"Well, what of it?" I asked him.

He lit that cigarette and puffed the smoke into my face.

"Monsieur is rather innocent. He does not understand the situation."

"I see no situation," I answered.

He looked me straight in the eyes and told me with cool arrogance that Madame Lecroix was his mistress.

And then—I knocked him down.

He was up and at me like a wild cat; but I managed to floor him a second time, and he seemed in less of a hurry to get up.

"Bien, monsieur," and he dabbed a split lip with a handkerchief; "I am not a Carpentier. But you will give me your card."

He was formal—devilishly formal; and it was obvious that he meant to call me out. I told him to apply to the English Consul, and that annoyed him.



He was up and at me like a wild cat, but I managed to floor him a second time, and he seemed in less of a hurry to get up

The Ace of Hearts

"We French," he began, biting his words, "we French have a keen sense of honour. We fight; we do not run to our lawyers."

I believe that he was now ripe for another rush at me, and I saw him throw a quick, predatory glance at the open tool-bag on the ground. A hammer or a big wrench can prove quite a useful weapon; but I was nearer the bag than he was; moreover, an unexpected intervention altered the whole temper of the game. Decugis had his back to the pine-wood, and it was I who saw Sonia rise up out of its shadows and stand looking at us.

I was afraid. I had a vision of that "little white cloud," as Brander had called her sanity, being torn to shreds by the shock of finding herself alone with two angry men on a wild hillside on Ile d'Or. It was intuition that served me—that great impulse of my love for her, surging up and overflowing the ugly realism of our passions. I was half-way towards the pine-wood before Decugis spun round and discovered this situation. I saw her poised, as it were, on the edge of our world of solid, human consciousness; trembling on the precipice, in danger of slipping back into tragic darkness.

"Beloved," I said, "it is all right. I am with you."

Strange, bald words—the blurring of a man's emotion, and yet I believe that there was a rightness in the words; they were a rope thrown to her half-drowned sanity.

I saw that she knew me. Her eyes were bewildered, and the soul in them seemed to reach out to me and to touch the warm reality of my love for her.

I threw a look at Decugis. He was watching us with devilish attentiveness, one eye half-closed, looking like a vicious and cynical little dog, or like some ingenious and sardonic young scientist who sees something very unexpected happening at the end of an elaborate experiment.

I was holding Sonia in the hollow of my arm, and I walked her away to the brow of the hill. She did not resist; she asked no questions. Her consciousness, plastic and confused, accepted the strong fact of my love for her and clung to it for support.

I wondered what Decugis would do. He answered that inward question of mine with the roar of his engine. He had not come near us; he had not spoken a word; his cleverness knew itself beaten. I had felt Sonia flinch when he had started his engine; but I held her more firmly and watched Decugis start his flight. His blue aeroplane rose and wheeled over the sea, turning to black against the yellow sun-

set, and growing less and less until it was no larger than a winging bird.

"Is this Ile d'Or?"

I smiled down at her. She was looking up at me with a faint flush of confusion and appeal.

"It is Ile d'Or, solid and real. Do you know that you have been dreaming?"

Her eyes looked straight into mine.

"I don't understand it all," she said; "a moment ago I was sitting reading in the loggia, and then I find myself here on Ile d'Or."

"Let's sit down."

"Dick," she said presently, "what have I been dreaming? How did I get here?"

"I brought you here."

"We flew here—in that machine?"

I nodded.

"And I did not know!"

I felt her give a slight shiver. A momentary darkness came into her eyes; she seemed to be on the edge of remembering.

"I am not going to tell you anything," I said.

Her body seemed to relax and to rest itself against me.

"Was there something, Dick? There must have been. I feel that I have been down—down in deep, dark water, and that you came and pulled me out."

She looked out silently over the sea.

"Don't tell me anything," she said presently. "Need you tell me anything?"

"There is one thing only—that I must tell you," I answered.

But that is our affair. She had come back into the light, and as we sat there on that hill-top, holding hands and looking out upon that dream-sea and those enchanted hills, I felt that the soul of her was healed. I was filled with a great awe.

We sat there till dusk fell, and then made our way down the pale hillside to one of the little farms.

"*Mon ami*," she said to me suddenly, as we went down the hillside, "I want you to promise me something."

"I suppose I shall promise anything!"

"Promise me never to fly again. The dear earth seems so solid and good to-night, and you—"

"I promise," I said.

We slept at the farmhouse, guests of pleasant peasants who accepted us as something surprising and romantic, and next morning I hired a boat and we sailed across to the mainland. Brander was waiting for us at the sea-gate of the Villa Morgana. He had spent the night in the house; the woman Suzanne had gone.

He gave us one large, comprehending look. "Bon chance, mes enfants," he said.

Broken Wings

by
WARWICK DEEPING

I ARRIVED at the Grand Hotel at Le Paradis in time to dress for dinner, and I did half my dressing on the balcony of my room, watching the mountains grow black in a red and opalescent sky. The sea was a deep blue, and from under the purple wings of the coming night the lighthouse on the rocky ridge of Ile d'Or had begun to blink like a great eye.

I was tired, and still a little submerged in the backwash of the war. In England life had been absurdly irritating; nothing had happened as we had expected it to happen; I had held out my hand to Labour and Labour had spat in my face.

"Look here, Herrick," my doctor-man had said to me, "get out of this for three months. You are too nervy still for the rough and tumble. Go south and soak yourself in sunshine."

"I've a sore brain," I had confessed.

"Exactly. A man can't crash twice at your age and come back to the old life as though nothing had happened."

In the *salle à manger* the *maitre d'hôtel* showed me to a little table against the wall. I sat down and looked about me. The room seemed full of women—old women, fat women, thin women, women with shawls, women in spectacles, women with wrinkled old faces, sour women, women who stared like ancient cows. It was a veritable salon of antiquities. There were a few men, but not one of them looked under fifty. Here and there some girl wedged in among the ruins glanced at me with a sort of pathetic and hungry interest. I was young. I was a man; but I admit that I was depressed.

"Good heavens!" I thought, "where do they all come from? What are they doing here?"

I soon realized that they were absorbed in the joy of eating. It was age tearing feverishly with its blunt teeth at the last shreds of life. At the next table were four old ladies and one girl; the old ladies wore white blouses with turned-down collars and little white bows; their jaws moved; their wrinkled cheeks seemed to creak like leather; one wore black spectacles that completely hid her eyes, another pince-nez, a third, the owl-like tortoiseshell rimmed glasses of America, the fourth, a green shade. I met the eyes of the girl. She looked pale, bloodless, vacant; these old women were sucking her blood.

Their conversation came to me in whiffs.

"Garçon, this fish is uneatable."

"At the 'Splendide' they give you butter with the spinach."

"Did you hear that Mrs. Betts took two oranges to her room, and they charged for them in the bill?"

"My dear, how paltry!"

"I wish they would give us more gravy with the meat."

I hurried through my dinner, and went down to the lounge, feeling irritable and disappointed. I was filling a pipe, and telling myself, "You must get out of this," when I caught sight of a big man—black-bearded—with the head of a Russian, talking to the concierge in the vestibule. It was Brander, the English vice-consul at Le Paradis—Brander whom I had known very well before the war, and who had been responsible for my coming to Le Paradis.

I fell upon him.

"Hullo!" he said; "I had strolled round to see if you had arrived."

He smiled at me with his shrewd, calm eyes, and his big head was like a bit of life. There was something vital, yet unexpected, about Byron Brander. He was mysterious, a man who failed to tone with modernity. He was English and yet he was not English. You saw the Phœnician in him, the Provençal, the Norman, the Lombard, the kin of Ruric, the blood of Ulysses. He was big, very big; his great, square, sombre head seemed to look at you out of the canvas of an old Vandyke.

"You are a nice fellow. What on earth made you billet me in this—"

"Charnel house!"

He laughed, and lit a cigar.

"Come outside into the garden and look at the stars. You must live somewhere. They feed you well at the Grand."

"But the old—"

"Man—I get them all day and every day. They even come and ask me if I can do anything about their false teeth! They will melt into the background, vanish, when you begin to realize Provence. A little dust in a corner—no more than that."

We went outside on to the terrace and saw the lights of Le Paradis mimicking the stars. There were chairs standing under a great breathless, shadowy palm, and the night smelt warm and fragrant. We sat down and Brander began to ask me about myself, but I was bored with myself and told him so.



He was up and at me like a wild cat, but I managed to floor him a second time

Read Warwick Deeping's Complete Long Story on the opposite page

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He listened, his great sagacious head like the head of a statue by Rodin.

"*Tiens!*" he said, "you need renewing, that's all. You want to get back to the soil—see our peasants here growing out of it. Provence in the spring! That will cure you. Life will ooze up into your feet—like sap into a tree."

"You are still a romanticist."

"Call me a vitalist."

"It's an illusion—romance. Just look what we become, like those old things in there, gobbling and grumbling—"

Brander laughed in his beard, that curious inward laugh of his.

"Nonsense. An hotel like this is always full of people who never learnt how to live, people who are always trying to run away from the dullness they have made of themselves. Romance! Good lord, man! It grows on the hedges."

"I'd like to see it growing," I said, a little irritably.

He turned to me, and the end of his cigar glowed.

"Would you? You doubting Thomas! It depends on a man's eyes, and his inward eyes—his imagination. Take down the map reference."

"Imaginary?"

"That depends. To-morrow morning walk down to the sea by the lane that leaves the Hermitage Hill and runs through the pinewoods. You will find a little bay. Turn to the right and follow a path. It will bring you to a wall and a hedge of cypresses."

"I look over the wall, I suppose?"

"Yes, you find a place where you can look over the wall. The rest will depend—"

"On my imagination?"

"That—and certain sensitiveness to impressions."

"All right," I said, "I'll go. And shall I report to you in the evening?"

"Come and dine at my villa."

"That's something definite to look forward to!"

"Herrick," he said, "don't mock. Everything can be forgiven save mockery."

In following the path that he had mapped out for me, I was following a mere vague curiosity, a curiosity tinged with the morbid cynicism of a man whose vitality had sunk very low. But this land of the south laughed with the joy of living. They were ploughing the fat red soil in the valley. Peach trees in blossom floated like pink clouds against the blue of the sky. The sun shone clear and strong. I saw the vines a-row, smelt violets and mimosa and the sweet perfume of the pines. An old man, brown as a rock, sang and chuckled like a bird as he pruned his olive trees. Nature, exuberant, glowing, exhaling perfume from her warm body, ran wild in the woods and fields, and where her feet touched the earth she left a pattern of sunlight in the young wheat or the grass.

I wandered through the pinewoods beyond the Hermitage Hill, and found the lane that led to the sea. It was a sheet of blue and silver between the ilexes and olives, and it made no more than a little quiet splashing among the rocks. I turned to the right, and reached a stone wall and a row of cypresses, found a spot where the soil was banked against the wall, and, climbing the bank, looked over into Brander's garden of romance.

The place had become a wilderness. It was full of ecstasy of growth, covered with a foam of greenness and of flowers. Roses and vines had climbed up the trees and over the bushes, and the very trees embraced each other. Mimosa had spread into the palms. Ilex and pistachio were looped and tangled with climbing maidenhair and bryony. The spaces were thick with anemones and tulips and the pink flowers of the cistus. The mysterious tangle of it all seemed to hide something, a secret sadness, a shadow as of unshed tears.

Beyond the trees I could catch a glimpse of the white walls and green jalousies of a villa. There was not a sound to be heard save the twittering of birds and the hum of bees, and the muffled splashing of the sea.

"Something has happened here."

A voice seemed to speak from the depths in me, and then I laughed.

"Old Brander was always a picturesque sentimentalist!"

The fractiousness of the sick man in me refused to be humoured. I turned away, and following the wall towards the sea, found myself above a glacis of rock covered with mesembryanthemum, sea-pink, thrift, and thyme. There were steps leading down to a tiny cove where a boat could lie in calm weather. An iron gate in the wall opened on the steps.

It occurred to me that I could obtain a view of the villa from this gate. I moved towards it along the wall, and then stood still, looking at a figure that seemed to glide like a reflection of myself in a half-darkened mirror. The gate posts were the frame of the mirror, its backing an avenue of cypresses shading a path that led to the gate. The figure was the figure of a woman. We had surprised each other, and for a moment we stood and stared.

I suppose that no more than five seconds elapsed before she moved on past the gate and disappeared. I had but a glimpse of a girl in a white dress, a strangely sensitive figure that seemed to float across a beam of light and vanish. I had had the impression of a pair of startled eyes of the same colour as the shadows under the cypresses, of a face that was mysteriously disturbing in that one seemed to be looking at a soul rather than at a face. In no other way can I describe the impression that it made on me. It was as though I had stood at the gateway of Hades and seen some tragic figure flash past, a figure whose flesh was a garment of pale light.

I sat down on the rocks and stared at the sea.

BROKEN WINGS

II

We had dined, and were sitting under the mimosa tree in Brander's garden. The smoke from his cigar drifted into the broad light-ray thrown from one of the windows and made little threads and cloudlets of silver.

"So you saw her," he said. "It is very rarely that she is seen."

"Does she live alone—there?"

"Alone—with one woman. An old gardener who has a cottage up on the hills goes to work there each day."

"And the reason?"

"Oh, she is mad, you know," said Brander; "that is to say—the ordinary person would consider her mad."

I was shocked—astonished.

"Do you mean to say that she is insane, and that they let her live there all alone?"

"It is not the sort of madness that people interfere with."

"Then what sort of madness is it?"

Brander sat forward in his chair, his elbows resting on his knees.

"Of course, we are all of us mad, a little more or a little less. You admit that?"

"I don't," I said.

He laughed his curious inward laugh.

"Herrick, let's agree that the ordinary stodgy person is comfortably sane; he responds to mere stimuli of the grosser sort; and we are not concerned with the stodgy person. When I speak of madness, I am thinking—perhaps—of the supernatural, or of those psychic states that an ordinary consciousness cannot account for. Sonia Lecroix is not mad. She only sees farther, feels more, than we do."

"So her name is Sonia Lecroix."

I felt Brander looking at me in the darkness.

"What's in a name? Of course, Herrick, if you are in a mocking mood—"

"I'm not. Something cured me of that—this morning."

"Then I'll tell you about her."

He lay back in his chair with that big, reposeful calm of his that made him so convincing.

"Sonia is half French, half English. Her people brought her up in the old-fashioned French fashion, and had her educated at a convent. Then they married her to Lecroix, an officer in the Flying Corps. That was just before the war. Sonia was one of those very sensitive women with a passion for idealizing things and people, and when Lecroix went to the war, I think she thought him a sort of Galahad. He wasn't. He was just a very ordinary sort of Frenchman, addicted to the sex adventure."

"I don't know how Sonia discovered that he had a mistress in Paris and was spending part of his leaves there. She was shocked—revolted. I gather there was a scene. She has told me that she said to him, 'May your evil passions be scorched—as you have scorched my love for you.'"

"Lecroix went back to the front. Two days later he was brought down in flames."

"The coincidence of the tragedy seems to have been a spiritual shock to Sonia. Her people were dead, and she was wealthy. She bought the Villa Morgana, and she has lived there ever since. She goes nowhere, and sees no one but myself. I knew her mother, and she sent for me when she came here, and asked me to manage her affairs. She seemed to trust me at once, like a child; I don't know why. That is her story, and you say that there is no romance!"

His cigar had gone out and he relit it. I watched the light of the match playing on his face.

"I admit the romance," I said. "And you say she never leaves the place?"

"I was wrong there. Once a week a carriage calls for her and drives her to the foot of the Hermitage Hill. She goes up alone to the crucifix, and spends an hour there."

"And you say she is mad?"

Brander was silent for a moment, like a man in the presence of some sacred thing.

"Don't you realize," he said, "that there is something abnormal behind all this—that she is the creature of obsession. We are all obsessed by something—in a greater or less degree. What Sonia Lecroix's obsession is I don't quite know. I have a suspicion that it concerns her husband, his sudden death, and those last prophetic words of hers to him. It may be that. I do not know."

"She has never spoken to you of it?"

"Never."

He told me more of her life at the Villa Morgana as he had glimpsed it during his occasional visits, and his interest in her made me wonder whether he dreamed of rescuing her from the aftermath of her tragedy. I had known Brander as an almost savage bachelor; but it was possible that he might have been waiting for the one, unique woman.

He seemed to read my thoughts.

"No, my lad; my interest in her is without ulterior motives. It might have been otherwise; I'll be frank about it; I realized that I was too much of the hardy old swashbuckler to persuade her spool to come back to earth."

His humility touched me, for I knew the pride of the man.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

And then he laughed.

"You see, I have no appeal. I am too solid. I have not suffered. I haven't sad eyes, or ruined health, or any of those pathetic failings that make a woman run to comfort your fool-boy of a man."

"I should have thought—" I began.

But he cut me short.

"No, I do not think that Sonia Lecroix will make that mistake a second time—even if she were in the position to make it. What I mean is—she would not idolize the man. It would be a much more human affair."

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And then he astonished me.

"I'm going to see her to-morrow. Walk over with me, and perhaps I shall be allowed to introduce you."

I sat up and stared at him.

"Look here, Brander," I said, "what exactly do you mean?"

He puffed smoke.

"Your letter suggested the idea," he said laconically; "you are rather above the average, Herrick."

I laughed.

"My dear chap!"

"I don't want the second man to be a Frenchman."

"Well—I'm——"

"No, you are not hanged; nor am I the eccentric idiot you imagine. Come over and be introduced to her."

I was a little bewildered by the astonishing audacity of his suggestion.

"But you say yourself that she sees nobody."

"She may consent to see a man whom I shall introduce as my own particular friend."

"And am I to infer that I am to interest myself——"

He answered me almost fiercely.

"For Heaven's sake drop that beastly English trick of pseudo-cynical facetiousness. Give up the English social varnish, the egg-shell lustre. And hang your interest! I suppose if I offered to take some Burlington Bertie to the house of Beatrice or the home of Laura he would shoot his cuffs and ask me if she played bridge."

He had stung me not a little.

"I'll go," I said, "and I'll not ask her if she plays bridge. But it is a rather extraordinary proposition, Brander."

"Is it?" he retorted. "Wait and see."

Brander lunched with me the following day, and we strolled down to the sea through the sunshine and the perfumes of an April afternoon. A man may be most blind when he thinks that he sees most clearly, and neither Brander nor I realized our blindness, nor could we have imagined the strangeness of that second tragedy that was about to threaten Sonia Lecroix. Brander left me at the sea-gate and walked up the cypress avenue to the villa, and I sat down on a rock and watched the sea spreading calmly towards He d'Or and the headland of Tête Noir. I felt curiously excited. It was as though the place held a spell.

Presently I heard Brander's footsteps returning.

"Dick——"

I stood up.

"Come along. You are admitted."

We passed up the avenue of cypresses and emerged upon a circle of grass in front of the white villa. Palms, olives, cypresses, and pines threw their shadows upon the grass and upon the white walls of the house, and the grass itself was starred with red and purple anemones. Under a palm tree, whose foliage spread a dome-shaped roof, stood two chairs,

and in one of them sat Sonia Lecroix. She rose as we crossed the grass towards her.

I admit that I looked at her for signs of the malady that Brander had spoken of; but my critical faculties were smothered by Sonia Lecroix herself. From the moment that she moved I saw in her something distracting and exquisitely strange. She had that indescribable and flowing grace that is seen in the movements of a wild creature—a liteness, a youthful softness that is largely unselfconscious. Her eyes were like black velvet, and they looked at you steadily and without fear. Her face was not instantly and obviously beautiful. The mouth was vivid and expressive, with the upper lip slightly lifted at the centre of the bow; the nose rather short; the forehead low and broad. It was what I should call a "woodland face," full of mysterious lights and shadows; elusive, pale, pure, yet richly sexed.

Brander was introducing me:

"Herrick is out here for his health. He had his wings broken twice during the war."

I saw a strange little tremor of emotion pass across her face.

"So you fought in the air."

She held out her hand to me.

"You look—a little too old."

"I was too old," I said; "that was my trouble."

I bowed over her hand, and then—for a moment—we stood looking at each other, and I believe that in that moment all manner of wonderful things happened to us. What she saw in me Heaven knows! Perhaps she saw more than I was conscious of, a rather peevish and restless creature, a thing to be touched and pitied, a soul to be healed. I know that I saw in her something that sent the blood to my brain. I went down like grass to the scythe.

We sat under the palm trees, Madame Lecroix and Brander in the chairs, and I on the grass and facing them. We talked—at least they talked, and I sat and looked at her like a bemused boy. And somehow her eyes seemed to look at me as though my silence said more to her than Brander's words.

We had tea there. It was brought out to us by her woman Suzanne. Suzanne interested me, and I disliked her from the first glance. She was tall and austere, with a crumpled, mean mouth, and hard, grey eyes. It seemed to me that she looked at Brander and myself as though she had stolen money and feared that we might take it away.

Before we left the Villa Morgana, Madame Lecroix showed us her garden. It was a wilderness of many acres.

"I let it grow as it pleases," she explained to me, "in spite of old Jean, who grumbles and shakes her head. A garden is so much more beautiful when it is not worried."

"I understand," I said; "we make the mistake of fussing Nature. You can let her paint her own pictures."

BROKEN WINGS

"Only Nature and plutocrats can afford to do that," said Brander, smiling in his beard.

Only once did I notice anything unusual in Sonia Lecroix. We were standing in a little grove of cypresses and pines, watching the tits and linnets in the trees, and suddenly she remained very still—listening. She seemed for the moment to have gone far away from us. Her eyes looked dark and clouded.

"It is nothing."

She smiled a smile of relief.

"Only—the birds."

Brander and I glanced at each other. I felt that there was another life, another world, something unseen by us beneath the surface of her normal consciousness.

We walked home in the glow of the evening, and the light shone within me, for she had asked me to visit her again. We were crossing the lower ridge of the Hermitage Hill when Brander pointed up through the pinewoods with his stick.

"That is where she goes—each week. The crucifix is up there."

I nodded.

"Do you know the day?"

"Yes, each Friday—Lecroix was killed on a Friday."

We walked on; and then he asked me a question:

"Did you notice anything?"

"Once."

"When we were standing under those trees?"

"Yes."

Brander frowned.

"She was right away from us," he said; "in some other world. I wonder what happens in that other world?"

III

THE next day happened to be a Friday, and the afternoon found me climbing the Hermitage Hill. The path began in vineyards and gardens, and then zigzagged into a wood of Mediterranean pines. The branches of the trees met overhead, and the broad and rocky path flowed below them like a torrent of stone. Only here and there could you see the sky, for the crowded trunks of the trees and their interlacing branches hid it from view.

The woodland tunnel took a sudden turn to the right, and I saw through its open archway the great crucifix intensely black against the blue of the sky. But I saw more than the crucifix. A low, semi-circular wall of stone bordered the little platform on the edge of the hill, and standing on this low wall was a man. His arms were spread as though he were mimicking the crucifix, and his figure showed black against the sky.

It is probable that I should have thought his presence there a mere coincidence had it not been for the cross-like poise of his figure, for that poise of his struck me as being so singular

that I paused in the shadows and watched him. The mystery and the silence of the place had made me more sensitive to vague impressions, and somehow I connected the man's figure with Sonia's weekly pilgrimage to the lonely cross upon the hill.

Suddenly he disappeared. He had jumped off the wall and vanished behind it. I looked at my wrist-watch. It was three o'clock, and Brander had told me that Sonia's carriage called for her at half-past two.

I did not know it then, but my whole future turned on the chance of my divining the man's presence here to be more than a mere coincidence. I did suspect it; why, I do not know. I left the path, and pushing in among the trees, worked my way towards the sunlight and the undergrowth at the seaward end of the hill. I had to pick my way very carefully because of the loose stones and the fir-cones and the dead wood, and I did the last twenty yards of the journey on all fours, crawling like a man-ape.

There was an old, twisted pine just ahead of me, its great rooty stub making a mound above the level of the ground. I made for it, and raising my head slowly, looked out over the smother of cistus, broom, wild lavender, and yellow spurge. The crucifix and semi-circular wall was above me and on my left, the ground falling sharply away from it towards the southern slope of the hill. For a while I saw nothing; there was no sign of the man; and then my eyes noticed a dwarf, flat-topped ilex almost directly in front of me, and about twenty yards away. The tree was no more than a bush, spread out like an umbrella, its outer foliage almost touching the ground; but there was something under the ilex, and that something was a man.

I pulled my cap down over my eyes and kept absolutely still. At first he had seemed part of the tree, but his figure gradually disentangled itself, and I saw him as one sees a bird hidden in a tree. He wore dark clothes and a black soft hat; he had his back to the trunk of the ilex; and his face was seen in profile. I could not distinguish his features, for he was too much in the shadow and half hidden by leaves.

I dare say that I had watched the man for three or four minutes when I heard the sound of footsteps on the stone path leading to the crucifix. The fellow under the tree heard them soon after I did, and I saw him stretch out an arm as though to make an opening in the foliage, and I realized that he could make a squint hole through which he could watch the crucifix while remaining invisible to anyone standing above.

I turned my head and saw Sonia Lecroix walk to the great cross. She was dressed in black and wore a white, gauzy scarf over her dark hair. Her face looked calm with the calmness of one who is asleep. I saw her kiss the beam of the crucifix and then stand with closed eyes as though she were praying.

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I glanced again towards the ilex tree. The man had not moved, and as I then thought him nothing more than a possible sneak-thief or bully, I watched him and waited for him to move. But he remained in ambush. He appeared to be absorbed in gazing at Sonia. I do not think he made a single movement all the while she was standing by the cross.

She remained there about twenty minutes sitting on the stone wall and looking out over the sea. Her face retained its dreaming calmness, and it was quite obvious that she had no thought of being watched. When she rose to go she moved languidly, almost as though some of her vitality had been taken from her. She looked tired.

I glanced again at the man, but he did not stir, and his immobility struck me as very singular. It occurred to me that his motive—if he had a motive—was more subtle and personal than the one with which I had credited him. I held my ground.

Sonia Lecroix's footsteps had died away before he came crawling out from under the ilex bush. He stood up and dusted his clothes, and I was able to get a good look at him with the dark foliage of the ilex for a background. He was a smallish man, either French or Italian, wiry, with a clever, clear-cut face, a neat little black moustache, and eyes set rather close together. He was well dressed, and made me think of an officer in mufti. I can remember being struck by the redness of his mouth, and by the way his masticatory muscles seemed to stand out, giving the lower part of his face a hungry and lascivious expression. I did not like the man. He looked what one calls a "clever little devil," hot, adventurous, yet calculating even in his adventures.

He climbed back to the cross and sat on the wall with his back turned towards me, and I took the opportunity of retreating into the wood. I did not wish him to see me so near the crucifix, and I walked back through the pines, and sat down beside the path about half-way down the hill. I had calculated on his taking the path, and on my being able to follow him, but I did not see him again. I waited for half an hour before walking up again to the crucifix. He had gone.

I went straight back to Le Paradis, and found Brander in his office. He was busy with some old lady who had had her vanity-bag stolen in a shop. When he had disposed of her he called me in.

I glanced at the clerk who was scribbling at another table. Brander understood.

"Go out and change those notes for me, will you, Gaston?"

The lad went.

I sat down on the far side of Brander's desk.

"I suppose you know most of the people in Le Paradis?" I asked him.

"It is a shifting population, my son. But why? Do you want an introduction to some particular person?"

"I am wondering whether you would recognize a particular man?"

"Describe him."

I described the man of the ilex tree, and I saw that Brander's curiosity was piqued.

"A red mouth and very pronounced masticatory muscles! I seem to remember someone—but I can't place him yet. What is the gentleman's significance?"

And then I told him what I had seen, and the mere idle interest went out of Brander's eyes. He sat forward and leant his elbows on his desk.

"Blessed be human curiosity, Herrick! I condone it in you, man. I had always wondered when it might happen."

"Then you don't think me a fool?"

He frowned and spoke slowly and emphatically:

"Far from it. You do not know France as I know it, Dick. It is a wonderful country with a wonderful people, but there are certain aspects of French life that are foreign to us. Sex is much the same all the world over, but in France there is a certain type of Frenchman, the man who combines violent passions with a most infernally quick eye for the dollar."

I nodded, and Brander went on:

"I have always wondered whether some enterprising adventurer, some Don Juan with a stock-jobber's soul, would discover Sonia Lecroix. She is one of the prizes in the great lottery. I knew that it would not surprise me if the gentleman arrived. Perhaps he has arrived. We shall see."

He pulled out a note-book and picked up his pen.

"Give me every detail you can remember."

I gave him them.

"There are not many young men of that class resident here. I know the officers of the garrison. Then there is the aviation school, a partly civilian affair."

He reflected, staring at what he had written.

"Yes, that's an idea."

And then he smiled.

"The test will be next Friday. I'll go with you to the crucifix, unless—"

"Of course you will come with me," I said; "if there is anything serious in this affair, it belongs to you more than to me."

He nodded his great head at me.

"Perhaps, my son. Perhaps not!"

IV

We may have thought ourselves rather clever people, but we were to discover that our cleverness was a mere thing of the soil, a crawling creature, a tortoise hunting a hawk. We had told each other that we should have to wait for a week before we might expect any further suggestion from Sonia's hypothetical lover. We were wrong.

It was on the Sunday that I first saw the aeroplane. I had scrambled to the top of Mt.

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Farfadet, and from it I had a gorgeous view of the coastline, Ile d'Or and the islets, and Tête Noir, and I could see the Villa Morgana and its garden from below me like a white rock and a little green foam on the edge of the sea. I was sprawling on the grass when I heard the hum of the machine's engine droning somewhere in the blue. It was a familiar sound, still vaguely distressing to me, for I had come out of the war with one of those blind terrors that are tangled up in the skein of one's fretted nerves. I could never hear the sound of an aeroplane without a queer thrill in my vitals, a sense of menace and of some impending catastrophe.

I sat up and looked for the machine, and for a minute I saw its silhouette hanging above the grey ridge of Ile d'Or. Then I lost sight of it again, and thought that it had disappeared beyond the island, though the hum of the engine seemed more distinct. Half a minute must have elapsed before I picked it up once more. It was flying low over the sea, and was almost indistinguishable, for the planes were painted a light blue. The thing looked like a great blue-winged dragonfly gliding above the calm water.

The aeroplane was heading straight for the Villa Morgana. It began to rise as it neared the shore, and I expected to see it turn and make away over the headland or back over the sea. But not a bit of it. The machine held on until it appeared to hang right over the villa, and then it began to circle round and round like a hawk sailing in search of its prey.

I sat rigid, watching it, yet I did not realize that there was any purpose in the aeroplane's manoeuvres. It flew steadily round and round at the same height, and the roar of its engine echoed up the valley. I wondered what the pilot was doing, what caprice had persuaded him to circle over that very spot. And then in a flash I remembered the manner of Le-croix's death, and my imagination blazed with an inspired vision.

I stood up. I believe I shouted at the thing.

"Clear out, you fool!
You'll frighten her!"

It was almost as though my absurd little shout had reached the pilot, for the machine zoomed up and turned towards the sea. I watched it grow less and less until it hung like a black dot beyond Ile d'Or. The sound of the engine died away, and I lost all trace of the machine in a film of sea mist.

The possible significance of the aeroplane's

flight over the villa never struck me at that moment. I thought it a mere coincidence, and I walked back to the hotel, made tea in my room, and sat reading one of Conrad's novels until it was time to dress for dinner. While I was dressing the lift boy brought me a note. It was from Brander; a curt scrawl:

"Come round and see me after dinner. I want to have a talk."

I took "Conrad" in with me to dinner, and I was growing so accustomed to the "cackling in the hen-roost," as Brander called it, that I could lose myself in a good book and forget the old women. There is no place like an hotel for making one realize what a complete fool the average person is, and my vitality was not sufficiently strong for me to squander it in an attempt to amuse these old people. Call it self-complacency if you will;



"Good-bye. It has done me
good—talking to you"

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I prefer to regard it as a reasonable measure of self-defence. I had been sick, and boredom kills the flower of a sick man's renewed interest in life. I kept a good book between me and the antique world of the Grand Hotel, and I have no doubt that the hotel world thought me a conceited boor.

When I strolled round to Brander's villa I found him in the garden, dressed in an old grey flannel suit, his hands deep in his pockets, and a book tucked under his arm.

Even in the dusk I saw that he looked worried. His eyes had a way of growing more prominent when something was working in his big head.

"Hallo! I'm glad you have come."

He climbed the steps and joined me on the terrace, throwing his book down on the round iron table.

"I have just come back from the Villa Morgana. I'm worried."

"What is it?" I asked him.

He pushed a chair forward.

"Sonia."

"Something the matter?"

"I'll tell you."

He lit a cigar, inhaled the smoke, and sat down opposite me.

"I went over there about tea-time, and found her in a most strange state—mentally, I mean. She hardly recognized me at first, and she could not talk connectedly. I stayed chatting to her, and she was more herself when I left."

He paused.

"What do you think it was?" I asked him.

"Herrick, it was as though she had been wandering in some other world, that other world, and had received some shock there. When I first saw her she was just coming back to the world we know. The curious part of it was that she did not seem to realize that she was not herself. Now—why?"

"Some shock!"

And then I saw the light.

"Brander, I can tell you something that might account for it. I was on Farfadet this afternoon, and I saw an aeroplane come in from the sea and fly low over the villa."

"An aeroplane?"

He looked at me quickly.

"It circled round several times, and I thought: 'That fellow will frighten her.' Perhaps it was that."

"What time would that be?"

"About three o'clock. You remember you told me how Lecroix was killed. I know how quickly certain things affect one when one has had a mental shock. If the plane came from the aviation ground here, the pilots ought to be warned against flying over the villa."

And then Brander astonished me.

"Supposing he flew there on purpose?" he said; "supposing the pilot and your man of the ilex bush are one and the same?"

I sat there and stared at him.

"But—what on earth—?" I began.

He got up and stood by the steps.

"Let us suppose it—for a moment. If it is so, then—Herrick—we are up against a man with a brain. What has he been thinking? What's his object? What psychological devilry has he conceived?"

"But—good heavens!" I said, "what could he gain by frightening her?"

Brander waved an arm.

"Shut up a moment, will you," he said in his brusque way; "I want to think. There is something at the back of my mind, and it won't come out."

Whatever it was, that something would not emerge, and we had to work upon the hypothesis that there was a man, and that he had an object and a plan. Brander suggested that I should walk over to the villa on the following afternoon and call on Sonia Lecroix. If the aeroplane paid the place a second visit, I might be able to see for myself what effect it had upon her.

"Meanwhile," he said, "I'll rummage around."

It was a favourite expression of his, and characteristic of his multifarious largeness.

The last thing he said to me was: "If the machine comes, and she seems strange, let her alone, man; just sit and watch. And, afterwards, pretend that nothing has happened."

It was one of those serene still days when I walked down through the woods to the Villa Morgana. The trunks of the pines were splashed with patches of sunlight, and the tops—thickly threaded with black pine-cones—made no movement against the blue of the sky. I entered the grounds of the villa by the gate opening from the Hermitage lane, and half-way down the path I met the woman Suzanne.

She was hurrying—head down—and she did not see me until I was close upon her, and then her eyes flashed up at me with a curious, hostile gleam.

"Monsieur—you frightened me."

She hesitated, and showed her teeth in a smile, a smile of concealment.

"Is madame at home?"

She shrugged.

"Perhaps."

She did not offer to go back with me, and I walked on, wondering what she was doing there and why she was in such a hurry. I could see no sign of Sonia when I came to the villa, but while I was hesitating on the steps of the loggia I saw a hand draw back a curtain at one of the french windows.

"It is you!"

She came out to me through the window, and the instant that her eyes met mine I had a feeling that she was glad to see me. A flash of sympathy, and of something more than sympathy, passed between us. The beauty and the mystery of her went straight to my heart. It has always seemed to me that the war had killed the mystery in the young woman of today, but in Sonia I discovered it in all its alluring strangeness. She was not of yester-

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day, to-day, or to-morrow, but a woman of all time, a creature of the deep waters and green woods.

There were two long chairs in the loggia. Madame Lecroix took one, and I the other. The loggia was curtained with wistaria, vines and roses; they climbed the stone pillars and hung from the beams above. Sonia was in black, and this blackness made her skin look like soft white vellum.

"You will have tea with me?"

"May I?"

She was one of those women who make a man discard his vanity as though he has been caught wearing a loud-coloured tie. I was shy of her, and she smiled as though my shyness amused her. I had a feeling that she let herself relax—that for the moment she was the happy woman seeking herself in the warmth of my admiration. I could not help what was in my eyes. I was at her feet.

"You are better," she told me; "already Le Paradis is doing you good."

I asked her how she knew.

"I can feel it," she said, half closing her eyes. "You bring something with you. An aura."

"So you believe in an aura?"

She opened her eyes wide.

"Of course! It explains so much. It explains everything."

We talked, and it became very plain to me that she had read and thought much since those convent schooldays in Belgium. Once or twice when she was not looking I glanced at my wrist-watch. It was past three o'clock and I wondered whether the angry hum of that wretched aeroplane would break the exquisite tranquillity of that April afternoon. Sonia had begun to make me speak of myself and of my experiences after the war. She seemed to have a most sensitive understanding of the difficulties and the disillusionments of the day, an understanding that astonished me when I remembered the lonely life that she had led. I found myself speaking of intimate personal experiences that I had never confided to anyone else. She understood them at once. She was like a mirror, with a soul in place of the glass.

"I think it all comes," she said, "of living with the wrong people. We were ready to sacrifice everything during the war, but when the war was over the reaction came. Most people went back to the husks of their selfishness."

She was so utterly right that I confessed my surprise.

"You know that?"

"I think I felt it coming before it happened," she said. "Perhaps I was a coward; perhaps I hid myself away from it; but you tried to go on battling, giving yourself as you gave yourself during the war. You were wounded and you bled in a world of flints."

She closed her eyes and lay back, and her dark head on the cerise-coloured cushion made me think of a pink shell enclosing her loveliness.

She remained quite still for nearly a minute, and I began to wonder whether I was to witness one of those phases of other-consciousness of which Brander had spoken. I listened for the sound of an aeroplane, but I could hear nothing but the humming of the bees.

Suddenly she opened her eyes.

"*Mon ami*, do not wound yourself any more. Open the door of your cage."

"You think that selfish?" she went on quickly, and before I could answer her, "but no. We must heal ourselves before we can help others. The hard people do not suffer, and most people are hard. Do not make the mistake of pitying them too much. They will take what you have to give, and give you nothing in return."

We had tea together in the loggia, the woman Suzanne bringing it to us with an air of sulky detachment. She did not look at me, but I felt her hostility and was puzzled by it. Was the woman jealous?

When I got up to go, Sonia rose and walked a little way with me up the path to the Hermitage gate. It seemed to me that we had come very near to each other. I knew that I loved her. To love her seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"Good-bye. It has done me good—talking to you."

I held her hand a moment, and it lay contentedly in mine.

"May I come again?"

"When you please."

I was half-way to Le Paradis before I remembered the aeroplane and the almost fantastic plot it had suggested.

When I returned to the hotel the concierge brought me a letter. It was from Brander.

"We are going to dine to-night at the *Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc*. Call for me at my villa at about quarter to seven."

I went up to my room to dress.

Brander was ready and waiting for me when I called for him, and we walked down through the *Jardin St. Louis* to the *Rue Thiers* where the *Jeanne d'Arc* stood. I soon realized that Brander had been "rummaging around." That large common sense of his showed in his method.

The officers of the *nth Infantry Regiment* dined twice a week at the *Jeanne d'Arc*, and it appeared that the flying-men of the aviation school also had a mess there. The *Jeanne d'Arc* was a provincial and purely French hotel; it did not cater for tourists, and everybody—officers and civilians—dined together in the *salle à manger*. The infantry mess had a long table of its own: the aviation school dined by itself in the corner of the window.

I shall never forget the long, bare room with its unpolished floor, and its smell that suggested wine, sawdust, and a faint odour of garlic. Its walls were distempered a pale blue,

and painted with festoons of pink roses. The walls looked fly-blown and dirty, and the flies themselves played a little planetary system round the electric lights, or cruised separately about the room. They crawled over the tables and over the rolls of bread; they settled on your head with exasperating regularity. Each table was decorated with an aspidistra in a glazed pot. The lay mess-table boasted two of these melancholy plants. I noticed that the silver looked tarnished, but the tablecloths and napkins were clean.

Brander had reserved a table at the far end of the room. We were early, and our only companion was a commercial traveller who was reading a Marseilles paper and picking his teeth with a match. Brander placed me with my face towards the door.

"If you recognize your man," he said, "tread on my foot."

The room began to fill. A fat waiter—stertorous and blue-nosed—arrived with the wine list, and breathed hard on the top of Brander's head. The officers of the *nth* came in twos and threes and took their places at the long table. One or two men in mufti wandered to their seats at the aviation table. The potage appeared—thin pea soup with flat pieces of stale bread floating in it. I had picked up my spoon when I saw a little dark man enter the room and make his way towards the aviator's table.

I trod on Brander's foot.

He glanced round in a slow, dispassionate and casual way. My man of the ilex bush was pulling back a chair before sitting down. Someone made a remark to him, and his red upper lip lifted in a smile.

Brander returned to his soup.

"That's it, is it?" he said with an air of indifference.

I nodded.

"I don't like it. And I have not seen it before."

The room filled and grew noisy. Brander and I talked and made a show of being absorbed in eating our dinner. He nodded and smiled at one or two of the officers whom he knew, and at the close of the meal a tall, fair man, with the rank-badges of a captain, came across to us and spoke to Brander.

Brander introduced us.

"Monsieur Herriek—le Capitaine Beauregard. Sit down, Beauregard, and have a liqueur with me."

The Frenchman drew up a chair at our table and sat down.

Brander was popular with other men; he was like a big dog with smiling eyes and a stately good temper; smaller men might yap, and the big dog was quite undisturbed. I liked Beauregard from the first glance; he was one of those blond, clear-eyed Frenchmen, a little reserved, pithy, long limbed and clean. He came from the north, and his temper was Nordic.

Brander offered him a cigar, and we sat

and, chatted. There was so much noise now that you could have talked scandal and no one would have heard you. Even the flies grew more active and vivacious. I used my napkin as a swish.

My French was not of the best, and I could not follow all that Brander and Beauregard said to each other, but I gathered that Brander had manoeuvred for a gossip whose ultimate object was my friend of the ilex bush. I understood them better when I saw Beauregard turn in his chair and glance towards the aviators' table.

"*La moustache noir?*" he asked.

"*Oui. Telle ville?*"

"*C'est Paul Decugis.*"

Beauregard gave an expressive twitch of the shoulders, and I saw little hard crystals of light form in his blue eyes. His antipathy strained at the leash. He did not like the man any better than we did.

"Decugis—Decugis!" said Brander softly, as though searching his memory; "not Paul Decugis—the famous 'ace'?"

Beauregard nodded. Then he broke into slang which I did not understand, but it made Brander laugh.

"*Un élégant!* You are like me, Beauregard, you do not love a man whose head is swollen."

"It makes me wish to play football."

"Exactly."

We chatted for another twenty minutes before Beauregard returned to his own people, and Brander and I rose to go. Decugis was still at his table, his chair tilted on its hind legs, a cigarette stuck with a *déagé* air in the corner of his red mouth. He glanced at us casually, and with a sort of amiable insolence that had become natural to him, and if our presence in the *salle à manger* of the Jeanne d'Arc had any significance for him he did not betray it by showing any interest in us.

Brander slipped his hand under my arm when we reached the street.

"You are sure of your man, Dick?"

"Absolutely."

"Do you realize who he is?"

"Decugis—the aviator."

Brander's fingers contracted on the muscles of my arm.

"One of the best fighters the French had. He is an instructor now at the aviation school. During the war he belonged to the 13th Squadron."

"An unlucky number!"

"The 13th was Lecroix's squadron. Doesn't that link things up a little?"

V

We went round to Brander's villa and talked. He had two English arm-chairs in his sitting-room, and we pulled them up to the window—and turned off the electric light. There is something crude and superficial about electric

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light, and Brander would have none of it; the stars shining in the blue-black sky and the flashing yellow of Ile d'Or were more in keeping with his subtle appreciation of life.

It was Brander who did most of the talking, and his deep voice seemed to match the darkness.

"Let's take the facts," he said, "and then try to evolve our theory. Decugis knew Lecroix; he knew all about Lecroix's death; it is probable that he knows a good deal about Sonia's life since her husband's death. It is possible that he made advances—and was badly rebuffed. His ingenuity was challenged. Let's assume that he is using his wits. If so—what does it mean?"

"To put it crudely——" I began; but Brander swept me aside.

"Oh, yes; there may be crude motives at the back of it all; but the truth seems to be that, at the moment, the fellow sees farther than we do. And that is impertinent."

He seemed to grind himself more deeply into his chair.

"Now—what about an obsession? Let's assume that Sonia has an obsession. What is it? What might it be?"

"I think she believes in life after death."

"Certainly. So do I. But what sort of life?"

"The actual presence of the spirits of the dead?"

Brander puffed smoke.

"Supposing," he said slowly, "supposing that she was obsessed by the idea that Lecroix is haunting her. Let's assume it. How would he arrive to her? How—might—he arrive to her? As she imagined him just before his death——"

"In an aeroplane—a ghost plane."

Brander sat up.

"By gad!" he said, and I saw his fists clenched under his chin. "Of course! Isn't that logical in a way? It accounts for the extraordinary effect Decugis's flight over the villa had on her. The point is: did he count on producing the effect; and if so, does he know that he produced it?"

"There is that woman."

"Suzanne?"

I told him my impression of Suzanne, and his figure seemed to stiffen.

"All right. Let's assume collusion; that Decugis has the woman in his pocket. She watches the effect that his plane has on Sonia, and reports to him. What next, Dick?"

I think we both jumped simultaneously to that last level of vision, for we sat in silence for some seconds. Then Brander moved uneasily in his chair. I saw his hands grip the arms of it as though the vital part of him were reaching out to grip and crush an invisible enemy.

"Good lord!" he said, "and that's the conclusion! If the man has conceived it, he is a devil. And there is a flash of genius in him, too. Our affair is obvious."

"To make sure?"

"Exactly."

He shook the ash from his cigar.

"Herrick, we have got to see for ourselves this—what shall I call it?—mesmerism by machinery! He did not fly to-day. He may do so to-morrow."

"Three o'clock," I said, understanding his meaning.

"Both of us. Call for me here at two."

It was past midnight when I got to bed.

We were in a silent mood when we strolled over to the Villa Morgana, and I know that my own thoughts were concentrated on what might happen that afternoon. I shrank from the idea of seeing Sonia in some humiliation of mental defeat—her real self surrendered and in bondage. I imagined a nakedness in the stripping off of her sensitive conscious self; the self that hides so much; the delicate veil of the ego. I confess that I was afraid, if this shrinking of mine could be called fear. Ask a lover if he has ever pictured the skeleton of the woman he loves stripped of the skin and flesh, and he will look at you with horror and with scorn; well, it seemed to me that I might see Sonia's soul stripped of skin and flesh; that I might be shown the organs and the bare bones of it; and my fastidiousness and my love rebelled. It would be a horrible piece of sacrilege, humiliating.

There was a wind blowing, and it made a restless stirring in the pines. I found myself listening, trying to disentangle some other sound from the noise of the wind in the trees, and when I glanced at Brander I thought I saw the same listening look in his eyes. He was curiously taciturn. Once he stopped dead and stared at the sky.

"I wonder if—that—was the first time?"

I did not catch his meaning.

"Decugis's flight over there," he explained, with a thrust of the arm.

There was something so sinister in the suggestion that I felt angry. Why could not Brander keep his imagination under control?

"Nothing has happened," I said obstinately: "it can't have happened."

We walked on, pretending to be absorbed in avoiding the loose stones in the lane; but I think we were shy of each other and of the thought that dominated us both. Our first glimpse of the sea was of an intense blueness swelling above the tossing tops of a grove of palms. We loitered along the path till we reached the gate in the wall. Brander went in first.

"Unbutton that face of yours," he said, with a glance at me as we turned up under the cypresses.

I laughed. It was the sort of laughter one indulges in before going into action.

If we men were a little too grim we found our contrast in Sonia Lecroix. She was lying on one of the long chairs in the loggia, reading, and she sat up and waved her book at us. Never had I seen her more normal; less the

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woman upon whom life was playing mysterious tricks. I noticed that she looked at Brander more often than she looked at me; but when her eyes did touch me, it was with a little glimmer of inward light—like a sun-ray playing in a wood.

"How irrelevant you are!"

She smiled at Brander as he pulled up a chair and sat down.

"I would prefer to be called a paradox."

"Imagine a paradox with a beard! I should imagine that masculine irrelevancy is always bearded," she said.

"Is that a subtle compliment to Herrick?"

"Oh, no! But I think that the clean-shaven man acknowledges the feminine element in himself. A man should have streaks of femininity."

"Let the blame rest on my ancestors," said Brander; "they mismanaged things."

We were struck by her spirit of playfulness, and commented on it afterwards to each other. Her sky had no cloud; but out of the other sky came that sudden menacing hum—the distant roar of an aeroplane. We were instantly alert, watching her, even while we pretended to lounge and trifle. I noticed a little wrinkle as of pain flicker up on Sonia's forehead. She sat listening. Her attention wandered from us. Almost she had the appearance of a woman who is bored.

The aeroplane was coming in from the sea, and the sound of its engine grew louder and more menacing. Brander was talking hard. I became aware of a rigidity in Sonia's figure; her eyes were dilated, and there was a faint flicker of redness in the big black pupils. She remained utterly still. Her eyes looked through and beyond us. She had ceased to bear any part in the conversation; I doubt whether she heard our voices.

Brander made a sign to me as the plane came roaring over the villa. I felt and saw its shadow passing, and I was conscious of that queer organic thrill in me—the sense of something catastrophic hovering in the immediate future. I saw Sonia shrink, and it was like the crouching of a bird in the grass. Each time the plane roared over the house she made that little movement as of crouching.

I felt a sudden rage against the man up there. I jumped up and made for the steps of the loggia, but Brander pulled me back.

"You idiot! Sit down!"

I saw something like fear in his eyes. I had never imagined that Brander could look afraid. I sat down, curiously ashamed.

At that moment Sonia began to speak, and we realized that the Sonia whom we knew was very far away from us. We listened to another woman, felt ourselves in the presence of some other personality, or of a subconscious self suddenly and awesomely naked. I am not a psychologist, and I do not know how else to describe it; but I do know that it frightened me, yet filled me with a most extraordinary tenderness, a passionate pity.

"Pierre," she said; "Pierre!"

Now Pierre was the name of her dead husband, of that Lecroix who had fallen like a flaming torch out of heaven. My eyes met Brander's; we both had realized how pregnant was that one word. But Sonia was speaking again in a little complaining, weary voice:

"Am I to have no rest? Have I not done everything? I gave you forgiveness when your other body was burnt."

That infernal plane came booming low over the house, and she put up her two hands as though mutely appealing.

"Pierre—you frighten me. It has been so quiet, so very quiet. Why must you come back for me—with that—with that?"

She wept, and it was amazing and tragic to see the other consciousness of her shedding tears. She looked to me like a sleeping child agonized by some dream.

"What is that you want? What do you wish me to do? Must I surrender a second time? No, I will not go with you; it is impossible! Oh, mother—mother!"

I felt that I could not stand it much longer; that I wanted to kill the man who was torturing this woman whom I had begun to love. I glanced at Brander and his face astonished me, for it was a bit of granite, the eyes set in a stone. He appeared to be watching something as a dog watches something that is invisible to his master, and then I realized that his eyes were fixed on the open window behind Sonia's chair. I could see nothing but the edge of a curtain and the curved back of a gilded settee; the rest of the room was all deep shadow.

Suddenly I became conscious of a sense of infinite relief. The throb of the plane's engine was growing less and less, and I realized that Decugis was heading away over the sea. The sound became no more than the humming of a gnat, and I saw Sonia's body gradually relax until she lay back with her head on the cushion. I glanced at Brander. He held up a hand that bade me be still.

And so we sat and watched her everyday self steal gradually back to her. At first she seemed asleep; presently there was a flickering of the eyelids, a closing and unclosing of the hands.

"Talk, Dick. Keep it up. She must not know."

He began to talk in a steady, cheerful voice, picking up the conversation at the point where it had been interrupted, and my respect for Brander was never so great as at that moment. I continued to play up to him, but I was a rather jerky and uncertain second-fiddle.

"You know, Herrick, you can never get back at your ancestors. They are people who played a sort of practical joke on us, and we have no way of retorting. Of course, you can edit your great-grandfather's memoirs and show him up as a rather scabby old rascal—but then—"

I managed to laugh.

"I don't see that you have much to complain of."

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"My point is"—and he edged his chair a little to one side—"that they mismanaged certain important details. Of course, that is part of the joke; but I dare say that Sonia will tell us—"

She had opened her eyes. Brander was smiling, and she answered his smile.

"Your poor ancestors!" she said languidly.

"Herrick is inclined to side with those dead fogies."

She had a slight frown on her forehead as though conscious of some clouding of her thoughts.

"We abuse what we do not understand."

"But can anybody believe that Herrick can understand my ancestors?"

In ten minutes she was talking as though nothing had happened, and I realized that she remembered nothing—absolutely nothing—of her passing into that other world. It amazed me. I was still under the spell of that great astonishment when Brander rose to go. She gave me her hand, and when I touched it I found it very cold.

"I am going to take Herrick home over the top of Farfadet."

She glanced from Brander to me.

"Must he climb Farfadet?" she asked.

"I am not quite so decrepit as all that," I broke in.

And then Brander marched me away. We did not go very far. He sat down under a stone-pine just beyond the half-acre of red soil where old François grew his vines.

"Well—what next?"

I answered his question with another:

"Why were you watching that window?"

"Because I saw something. Did you?"

"Nothing."

"When a curtain moves in a certain way, just when there happens to be no wind, you may infer that a door has been opened and closed. The woman Suzanne was in that room."

"Spying!"

Brander nodded.

"She wears black, you know; but she had not thought of muffling up her face in a shawl. I had just one glimpse of her face."

This suggestion of Suzanne's treachery was like the last straw added to an accumulation of stresses, and my temper gave way.

"This has got to be stopped; I don't care what methods we use."

He had picked up a pine-cone and was pulling it to pieces with an air of leisurely detachment.

"What kind of methods?" he asked without looking up.

"Sack the woman—and settle with Decugis."

"How?"

He looked up at me, and I found his calm eyes rather exasperating. I must confess that I had no definite plan, and that, too, was exasperating.

"Dick," he went on, "the situation is rather delicate; it can't be attacked with rough-and-

tumble methods. At least, I don't think so. The obvious thing for us to do is to find out whether there is a place where Decugis and his machine can land."

I gave him a quick look.

"It will come to that?"

"Don't you see it? Any day. He must follow the scheme up; drop down like a hawk while the prey is still fascinated."

"Brander!" I said. "If I have to shoot Decugis—"

Brander rose in his slow, large way and took me by the elbow.

"Oh, bosh, man! We shall use our wits, and leave cinema stunts to the fools."

We explored the ground in the neighbourhood of the villa, and presently we came upon a little stretch of flat grassland surrounded by groves of olives. Brander scanned it, with his thumb and forefinger fretting in his beard.

"Well, what about it? You ought to know."

"It's too small," I said.

"Sure?"

I reconsidered my verdict.

"No, perhaps I'm wrong. These new planes are very quick off the ground. It could be done."

"Let's measure it. Remember, Decugis is an expert."

We paced out the length of the grassland.

"Yes, I think it could be done."

Brander seemed satisfied.

"One of us will have to be here when it is—done," he said; "that will be the next cog in our wheel."

VI

It was plain to us both that we had certain very definite facts to go upon.

"There was no doubt about the obsession," Brander said to me as we climbed slowly up the stony path that led over Farfadet; "but the point is—what use will Decugis make of it? Of course, that woman tells him everything."

It occurred to me that they must have arranged a signal code, and we discussed its possibilities.

"He will have to be sure that Sonia is alone before he makes his landing, and you can be pretty certain that Suzanne will show some sort of signal, say—a white sheet or tablecloth spread out in some conspicuous place."

"I wonder whether he suspects us of guessing his game, or thinks us fools?"

"A man of Decugis's temper suspects everybody."

"We shall have to count on his altering the time of his flights. Suzanne will warn him that we are at the villa about four. He'll come later."

Brander agreed with me. We had reached the crest of Farfadet and we sat down on the grass, with all that smiling world spread under the calm eyes of the evening. The distant islands were flushed with a soft, rosy light that

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merged into pearl grey; they looked strangely ethereal and unsubstantial, almost diaphanous, like masses of coloured vapour. This Provençal world had a wonderful atmosphere. It made one think of the dawn of history, of Homeric fantasies, enchanted seas, the Islands of the Hesperides, heroes in sable ships, blind Polyphemus hurling rocks, Calypso making the stars tremble with her sighs.

We sat and dreamed.

"And they would say it never could happen."

I turned to Brander. He was sitting with his elbows on his knees, his big head tilted slightly backwards, his eyes amused yet infinitely wise.

"The stodgy people?"

"They expect a great noise—you know, Her-
rick; and then they expect to see it in the daily paper, head-lines, and all that! I wonder how many people knew how quiet the war was; quiet—I mean—in its human action?"

"It—was—quiet," I said; "and, somehow, you were never surprised. Things just happened."

"Just happened!" And he smiled. "But that's life—life spilling over and making itself felt. Now what about this affair of ours; this affair which no stodgy person would believe in?"

"There is a thing we call sanity, Dick; a certain average way of reaching to life's affairs. In Sonia, I see, it is a little bit of white cloud clinging to the top of a mountain. It might melt—blow away."

"If Decugis is not discouraged?"

"No; but if we discourage him too clumsily. It is we who might supply the shock—the wind to scatter that bit of cloud."

Then I made the clumsiest of suggestions:

"Would a doctor-man be of any use?"

And then Brander laughed—laughed as though I had sprung a divine jest on him.

"Oh, my lad! A bottle of physic! Or even a little dose of mild suggestion. Some solemn person in pince-nez! Much better call in Homer or Old Nick."

"I may be a confounded fool!"

"Not a bit of it. But haven't you any sort of impulse? I'm groping down in the depths of myself, trying to get hold of that elemental inspiration, the answer that Nature has ready somewhere. Can't you supply it?"

I turned over on my stomach, and lay with my chin on my crossed wrists.

"What sort of answer? It is up to us to break that obsession of hers; to prevent Decugis from using it. Isn't that the idea?"

He nodded.

"I'm getting there," he said presently; "something is coming."

I pulled a grass stem and chewed the end of it.

"Dick," he said suddenly.

"Well?"

"Supposing you were to use the obsession; cut in and play Decugis at his own game?"

I rolled over and stared at him.

"You mean—"

"Get hold of a plane and swoop in ahead of him. That is the idea I have been groping for."

I had a strange feeling of darkness within me, something that was like shame.

"I haven't the nerve," I said.

He did not answer me for a moment.

"Perhaps—some event—will supply you with the necessary nerve."

I suspected him of sarcasm, and I was angry; but I was soon to realize the depth and the subtlety of his inspiration.

Assuming that Decugis would attempt a descent on the grassland among the olives, it was agreed between us that we would watch the villa in turn, each of us taking an afternoon. I must confess that my visualizing of what might happen was very vague and uncertain, and I had no forefeeling of what I was to see or to suffer. I left Le Paradis about two o'clock, and taking a path that led over one of the lower spurs of Farfadet, I reached the wire fence that formed the boundary of Sonia's wilderness on the side towards the hills. There was a belt of pines here sheltering the house and garden from the north; the fence was easily climbed, and I sat down under the pine trees and waited for the coming of Decugis's aeroplane.

I had been there three hours, and was persuaded that the afternoon was going to prove uneventful, when I heard the distant hum of the plane's engine. The hands of my watch stood at ten minutes past six, and Brander had told me that old François left his work at six and trudged back to his cottage on the lower slopes of Farfadet. A tremor of excitement ran down my spine. I followed the belt of pines until I reached a thicket of stunted evergreen oaks close to the olive groves that surrounded Decugis's hypothetical landing-stage, and here I hid myself in the scrub.

As usual, Decugis flew his machine in circles over the villa, sometimes swooping so low that he almost touched the house. After ten minutes of this hawk's play, he shut off his engine, and I realized that he was coming down. He made a perfect landing on the grass between the olive groves, the blue biplane coming to rest so quickly that he had thirty yards of clear ground between him and the trees. I watched him climb out of the pilot's seat. He was wearing a leather coat and helmet that made him look like a big bronze beetle. His movements were quick and alert; but they were not the movements of a man who was flustered. He left the machine and disappeared among the grey trunks of the olives, and I gave him a minute's "law" before breaking cover and following him towards the villa. I was extraordinarily cautious, for it was essential that he should not discover that he was being watched.

Beyond the olive groves lay the vineyard, and beyond the vineyard a winding path cut

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through a tangle of tree-heath and yellow broom to the open space in front of the villa. I was half-way down this path when I heard a man's voice calling Madame Lecroix by name:

"Sonia! Sonia!"

Pushing into the tangle of growth, I slowly worked my way forward until I had a view of that open space of rough grass, still purpled with orchids and anemones. Wild hedges of red Provençal roses caught the evening sunlight as it slanted through the trees. And into this pool of colour and of interplay of lights and shadows the white steps of the loggia descended like steps into some still pool.

Sonia was standing on those steps. She seemed to dream with wide-open eyes that looked like two circles of unseeing shadow. Her figure appeared to me both rigid and flexible, like a statue endowed with the power of movement. She came slowly down the steps and paused on the edge of the grass, and my glance went to that other figure—that figure in leather that stood waiting for her; a thing of bronze in the glow of the sunset.

I can describe only what I saw. Its effect upon me was so elemental yet so complex, and also so ugly, that I prefer to leave it in the limbo of things that are better forgotten. For perhaps half a minute the two figures remained absolutely still and about twenty yards apart. I guessed that Decugis was willing her to come to him; that she was in a state of trance and open to suggestion.

Quite suddenly she moved and went slowly across the grass towards him. I saw Decugis's face in profile; a voracious and exultant face that smiled; and the thought came into my head: "If he touches her I shall kill him." It was followed by a second thought: "If you wake her with violence—what will happen?"

I remained where I was, feeling most horribly helpless, and conscious of a sense of savage shame. Sonia was standing close to Decugis, facing him in an attitude of languid and



Two minutes later we were soaring over the sea

obedient expectancy—an expectancy in which there was neither surprise nor emotion. I suppose that other consciousness of hers imagined itself in the presence of Pierre Lecroix. I was so absorbed, for the moment, in watching her that I forgot to look at Decugis's face; but when I did remember to look at it, the expression on it shocked me. The soul of the man showed there, naked and unashamed.

I saw him lay his hands upon her shoulders. She did not resist, nor did she respond.

"Ma chérie."

His right hand moved—caressed her neck, took the lobe of her ear between thumb and forefinger, and pinched it with a suggestion of tender playfulness. He was experimenting. Then, very slowly, he drew her closer until her face was near to his. She did not resist. Her eyes looked obedient and blind.

I lost my nerve for the moment and crouched down among the bushes, trembling with an anger that was helpless and humiliating, and

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when I made myself look at them again Decugis had Sonia in his arms. He was kissing her, and she was taking his kisses as a statue might have taken them.

And then I was made to realize that this man was something of an epicure in the matter of the emotions. He had learnt the restraint that holds back in order to enjoy. He knew how to dally even with his own passions; to sip the wine, to smell the flower, to touch the warm velvet of her with delicate exultation. Perhaps, too, he was clever, cautious in his experimental passion. He wished to make sure of dominating her completely; to return and prove his power over her day by day.

For presently he let her go and pointed to the house.

"Good night, *chérie*."

She turned like an obedient child and walked back across the grass to the villa, and Decugis watched her until she reached the steps of the loggia. I ducked down among the shrubs and heard his footsteps go by within three yards of me, and for the moment I thought of rushing out at him. Something—the thought of Brander's anxiety—held me back. My recklessness had a more subtle and audacious inspiration. I even went and watched him with the curiosity of a rival and a fellow expert. He pulled the plane round by one wing, spun the propeller until his engine started, climbed in and cleared the olives by twenty feet.

VII

BRANDER told me afterwards that he knew what had happened when he caught sight of my face as I entered his room. "It has come back to you," he said to me; "I thought that your nerve would come back."

I sat down in one of his big chairs, and he reached over and passed me his cigar-box. I smoked as one used to smoke sometimes during the bad hours of the war—savagely, feverishly, without the nicotine having the least effect.

"My nerve has come back all right," I said, and then I told him what had happened; but not quite everything, for I could not bear to speak, even to Brander, of some of the things that I had seen.

He sat deep in his chair watching me with his shrewd eyes, and there was calmness about the man that made the wild intervention that he had suggested seem logical and true. It did not even astonish me that I should be sitting there in that French room discussing the most fantastic adventure: the battle of flying men for the love and the soul of a woman. And yet, after all, it was no more than the old tale modernized; romance in a twentieth-century setting; Lochinvar handling a biplane instead of straddling a horse.

"Are you up to the strain of it?" Brander asked me; "I'm not worrying about anything else."

I told him that when a man had seen what I had seen he was equal to flying over the moon.

"You see, I love her," I said; "it has happened that way."

He nodded. Those simple words of mine seemed as inevitable to him as they were to me.

"That settles it. We will motor over to Le Drapeau early to-morrow morning. I know Aubert, who is in charge of the aerodrome there. His company has brought out that new machine, the Etoile II."

"But will they let a stranger fly one of their machines?"

"Dear lad, I am not too old to spin them a yarn. Remember you are a managing director of Vigall and Black; you have heard of the Etoile II, and want to try her before making a commercial proposal. They'll hire you a machine all right. Of course, you will have to spend a day or two at Le Drapeau."

"What for?"

"Well, is not a new machine rather like a new horse? Besides—they may insist on your having a little coaching before you go up alone."

"That's the point," I said; "will they let me go up alone?"

Brander smiled.

"Mr. Herrick will be introduced by the English Vice-Consul. He may have to exercise a little ingenuity in order to get away without an observer!"

"I have done it before," I said. "Meanwhile, what shall I do about the Villa Morgana?"

Brander was prepared for that.

"I shall drive back directly I have fixed you up at Le Drapeau. You can leave the Villa Morgana to me."

There are some men who carry a plan through with an inevitableness that reminds one of the precision of a machine. Brander was the least mechanical of men; but in the matter of psychology and in the handling of human nature he showed an almost supernatural cleverness that was inspired, I believe, by a wonderful intuition. It was interesting to watch him manipulate Monsieur Aubert, of the Compagnie d'Etoile, a florid and rather truculent Frenchman, with a hard blue eye and an aggressive jaw. Brander was all *bonhomie*; serene and easy friendliness. He managed to convey the impression that he was conferring a delicate and personal favour upon both of us by introducing Monsieur Aubert to the managing director of Vigall and Black.

But to begin with, Monsieur Aubert would have nothing to do with us. For some personal reason he was feeling rather sore against the English.

"Impossible," he said, "quite impossible."

Brander shrugged his shoulders, smiled, remarked that it was a pity, and began to talk about something else. But he came back to

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the point, touching upon it half-humorously, using just a little flattery, suggesting that the commercial proposition might have proved very promising. "Besides, Monsieur Herrick was one of our experts during the war. He has brought down innumerable Boches."

I confess that I stood there suffering inward rages, trying to look mildly at the man who was sitting on the soul of my adventure. And yet I was astonished when he began to show signs of being persuaded. He was very cautious, and I suppose the French are the most cautious and the most suspicious people in the world. I backed Brander up with a broad hint as to some future commercial arrangement. Aubert said that I might look at one of the machines, and their pet pilot might even take me for a trial flight.

I asked him if I might try the machine myself, after a little instruction.

He grinned and shook his head, and from the look that Brander gave me I guessed that this was Monsieur Aubert's preparation for saying "yes."

There was a shabby little hotel at Le Drapeau, and when Brander left me there, he made a characteristic remark:

"If you can't manage it now—you are no soldier."

"I'll manage it," I said.

"Any idea what you are going to do?"

"If I get away alone with the machine?"

"Yes, after that."

"I shall fly over there."

"And then?"

I had to confess that I had not the slightest idea; and he looked at me in his queer, deep way.

"No plan?"

"I'm leaving it to instinct. I have a notion that I shall get my inspiration."

Brander buttoned up his coat.

"Perhaps it's as well," he said. "Yes, leave it to instinct. It does not do to be too clever in these affairs of the heart!"

I need not describe all that happened at Le Drapeau, or how I chummed up with Criqui, their pet pilot, who introduced me to Etoile II.

He went up in the observer's seat with me, and after a little careful cruising, I found that I could handle the Etoile with perfect confidence.

Criqui was pleased.

"Ot stuff!" he said in his crude English.

I laughed.

"I should like to take her up again tomorrow on my own, but your Monsieur Aubert—"

Criqui made a grimace. He had an immense contempt for Aubert, the flat-foot, the man of commerce, the earth-bug, as he called him.

"Aubert—finis—two days," he said.

And that is how it came about that I got away alone with Etoile II about four o'clock on a golden April afternoon. I was in great heart, and as exultant as a boy, but behind all

my exultation lay a sort of fear, an immense curiosity, a puzzling sense of vagueness as to what I had to do. My mind was a bit fogged, but it was not the mind part of me that was needed.

I had been in the air less than half an hour when I sighted the familiar outlines of Tête Noir and Ile d'Or. It occurred to me that Decugis might be out on the same adventure, but I did not worry about Decugis, and I headed for the villa under the slopes of Farfadet, and coming down to within three hundred feet, played round in great circles. I had lost all my "nerves," and was quite confident of hitting off that landing among the olives.

I sighted the open ground. Decugis's plane was not there, and I straightened out, shut off my engine and came down with an easy glide.

I was putting the machine round ready for restarting when Brander came upon me suddenly from among the olives, and I stood and stared at him like an helpless fool. I think that Brander understood. His face had a queer, glowing solemnity above the blackness of his beard.

"Herrick! What the devil are you waiting for?"

I felt his fierceness tingling in my blood.

"She's there," he went on. "Decugis was here yesterday. He—"

I understood. Something flared up in me, that exuberant, passionate life that seemed to have deserted me when I touched the earth. I gave Brander a jerk of the head, and went down through the wilderness to the villa.

From that moment, in any ordinary self-conscious sense, I was not myself; I was inspired. Sonia was there, waiting on the steps for me, and I found myself holding her hands and looking into eyes that were like darkened windows, for the mystic curtains were drawn across her soul. She did not know me any more than she had known Decugis.

I led her up through the olives, and she came like a dreaming child. Brander was not to be seen. And there I took Sonia in my arms, lifted her up, and placed her in the body of the machine. I strapped her into the observer's seat, covered her with a heavy rug that I had brought, and spun the propeller and started the engine. Two minutes later we were soaring over the sea.

I had done a mad thing—and even then I did not realize how mad it was, or where the madness might end. Blind instinct seemed to be working in me. I had to carry Sonia away, away from herself, from the obsession of Lecroix's imagined spirit, from the fog of Decugis's inspired devilry. But where was I taking her?

The introspective part of me soon had the hatches shut down on it, for a moment later I sighted that other plane, a dot tinged with a faint blueness hanging above the ridge of Tête Noir. I guessed at once that it was Decugis. I had forestalled him, but that was all.

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I wondered whether he would suspect the truth, or whether the woman Suzanne would be able to show him any sort of signal that would put him wise as to what had happened. I guessed that she had been watching—and that she knew. And soon I saw his machine turn towards the sea, and I guessed that he was after me.

As I brought the Etoile round again my eyes caught the grey blue outline of Ile d'Or. I knew the island very slightly; it was thinly wooded, with one or two grassy plateaux sloping gently towards the sea. There were a few small farms on the island—the cultivated ground lying about the houses that were scattered along the lower slopes of the hills. I headed the Etoile for Ile d'Or, giving her all the kick that was in her engine. I knew that Decugis was after me, and I wanted to make that island two minutes ahead of him, for those two minutes would be very precious.

As I spiralled down towards the island I caught a glimpse of Decugis's machine well away over the sea. A little whimper of exultation went through me. But all my wits were now concentrated on picking out a landing place, one of those lonely, grassy plateaux where the slope was not too sharp. As I came down I spotted a likely place running green and flat along the edge of a pine-wood, and I fixed on it as my landing stage. Climbing out, I found Decugis still a mile or more away, for which mercy I thanked my God.

For I had my plan now. It had come to me suddenly as I was planing down, and I think it must have blown to me out of Sonia's tremulous hair. I unstrapped her. She appeared to be in a state of trance, and when I lifted her out and carried her to the wood she lay in my arms as though asleep. There was a big, old flat-topped pine on the edge of the wood, with a mass of resinous undergrowth growing under it and making a sort of natural hedge. I laid Sonia in the shelter of the undergrowth, went back for the rug, and covered her with it. She was hidden there.

I went back to the Etoile, took the tool-bag out of the locker, and became very busy unscrewing and inspecting the sparking plugs. I was wondering what Decugis would do. I knew that he had been too far away to distinguish what I was doing when I had carried Sonia into the wood.

He was very close now. He circled round once or twice, and then shut off his engine and came down. His machine landed within twenty yards of the Etoile, but I gave it a mere casual glance and went on with my pottering.

Decugis climbed down and came across to me. He was smiling, and showing a red mouth very full of teeth.

"In trouble, monsieur?"

He came round and stood close to me—his sharp eyes running all over the Etoile.

"I'm having a look round—that's all," I said.

I went on with my pottering. He stood and fidgeted, and then strolled round the Etoile as though he were interested in her.

He came back.

"From Le Drapeau, eh?"

I nodded.

"Do you find her pleasant to handle, monsieur?"

"Very."

Then he tried a shot at me.

"Your passenger was a little nervous, perhaps?"

I gave him an uncomprehending stare; I was rather proud of that stare, but I did not know my Decugis.

"Passenger! What passenger?"

He grinned.

"I thought that you had someone with you, monsieur."

"You have an imagination!"

He dawdled about, pretending to try to light a cigarette.

"One gets ideas into one's head," he said with an air of casual candour; "I could have sworn that you had an observer with you."

"An optical delusion, monsieur."

He tried a third match on his cigarette, but the match went out. Now there was hardly any wind.

"Tiens!" he looked amazed, "I'll get a light over there."

He started towards the pine-wood, and then I saw his game.

"Monsieur!"

My voice had a nasty, rasping edge to it, but he whipped round and came back smiling.

"So there was a passenger, monsieur!"

"I beg your pardon!"

"And a lady!"

He was standing quite close to me and looking at me with sly insolence.

"Well, what of it?" I asked him.

He lit that cigarette and puffed the smoke into my face.

"Monsieur is rather innocent. He does not understand the situation."

"I see no situation," I answered.

He looked me straight in the eyes and told me with cool arrogance that Madame Lecroix was his mistress.

And then—I knocked him down.

He was up and at me like a wild cat; but I managed to floor him a second time, and he seemed in less of a hurry to get up.

"Bien, monsieur," and he dabbed a split lip with a handkerchief; "I am not a Carpentier. But you will give me your card."

He was formal—devilish formal—and it was obvious that he meant to call me out. I told him to apply to the English Consul, and that annoyed him.

"We French," he began, biting his words, "we French have a keen sense of honour. We fight; we do not run to our lawyers."

I believe that he was now ripe for another rush at me, and I saw him throw a quick,

(Continued on page 759)

BROKEN WINGS

predatory glance at the open tool-bag on the ground. A hammer or a big wrench can prove quite a useful weapon; but I was nearer the bag than he was; moreover, an unexpected intervention altered the whole temper of the game. Decugis had his back to the pine-wood, and it was I who saw Sonia rise up out of its shadows and stand looking at us.

I was afraid. I had a vision of that "little white cloud," as Brander had called her sanity, being torn to shreds by the shock of finding herself alone with two angry men on a wild hillside on Ile d'Or. It was intuition that served me—that great impulse of my love for her, surging up and overflowing the ugly realism of our passions. I was half-way towards the pine-wood before Decugis spun round and discovered this situation. I saw her poised, as it were, on the edge of our world of solid, human consciousness; trembling on the precipice, in danger of slipping back into tragic darkness.

"Beloved," I said, "it is all right. I am with you."

I saw that she knew me. Her eyes were bewildered, and the soul in them seemed to reach out to me and to touch the warm reality of my love for her.

I threw a look at Decugis. He was watching us with devilish attentiveness, one eye half-closed, looking like a vicious and cynical little dog, or like some ingenious and sardonic young scientist who sees something very unexpected happening at the end of an elaborate experiment.

I was holding Sonia in the hollow of my arm, and I walked her away to the brow of the hill. She did not resist; she asked no questions. Her consciousness, plastic and confused, accepted the strong fact of my love for her and clung to it for support.

I wondered what Decugis would do. He answered that inward question of mine with the roar of his engine. He had not come near us; he had not spoken a word; his cleverness knew itself beaten. I had felt Sonia flinch when he had started his engine but I held her more firmly and watched Decugis start his flight. His blue aeroplane rose and wheeled over the sea, turning to black against the yellow sunset, and growing less and less until it was no larger than a winging bird.

"Is this Ile d'Or?"

I smiled down at her. She was looking up at me with a faint flush of confusion and appeal.

"It is Ile d'Or, solid and real. Do you know that you have been dreaming?"

Her eyes looked straight into mine.

"I don't understand it all," she said; "a moment ago I was sitting reading in the loggia, and then I find myself here on Ile d'Or."

"Let's sit down."

"Dick," she said presently, "what have I been dreaming? How did I get here?"

"I brought you here."

"We flew here—in that machine?"

I nodded.

"And I did not know!"

I felt her give a slight shiver. A momentary darkness came into her eyes; she seemed to be on the edge of remembering.

"I am not going to tell you anything," I said.

Her body seemed to relax and to rest itself against me.

"Was there something, Dick? There must have been. I feel that I have been down—down in deep, dark water, and that you came and pulled me out."

She looked out silently over the sea.

"Don't tell me anything," she said presently.

"Need you tell me anything?"

"There is one thing only—that I must tell you," I answered.

But that is our affair. She had come back into the light, and as we sat there on that hill-top, holding hands and looking out upon that dream-sea and those enchanted hills, I felt that the soul of her was healed. I was filled with a great awe.

We sat there till dusk fell, and then made our way down the pale hillside to one of the little farms.

"*Mon ami*," she said to me suddenly, as we went down the hillside, "I want you to promise me something."

"I suppose I shall promise anything!"

"Promise me never to fly again. The dear old earth seems so solid and good to-night, and you—"

"I promise," I said.

We slept at the farm-house, guests of pleasant peasants who accepted us as something surprising and romantic, and next morning I hired a boat and we sailed across to the mainland. Brander was waiting for us at the sea-gate of the Villa Morgana. He had spent the night in the house: the woman Suzanne had gone.

He gave us one large, comprehending look.

"*Bon chance, mes enfants*," he said.

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THE NEW MAGAZINE

(30)

The Exile

by WARWICK DEEPING
(Author of "Sorrell and Son")

It takes all sorts to make a world, but many of them are good sorts!

SHE came up the river on the flood tide, past the swinging and curtsying buoys, past the old derelict windmill and the brickstacks towards the red roofs of King's Avon. Her white hull and sails were reflected in the oily and dun-coloured water. Beyond the flood-banks stretched green fields, league upon league, browsed over by fat cattle. The ancient town and seaport of King's Avon lay like a great red button in the midst of this greenness, threaded upon a piece of tarnished wire—that was the river.

She was a German boat, schooner rigged, painted white to the water line and green below it. *Sturm* was lettered upon her bow and stern; she carried a cargo of artificial manure. Half a mile below the town a little panting tug took charge of her; such sail as she was carrying fluttered and fell; she was warped up to the long old stone quay just opposite the harbour house with its octagonal lantern. She was made fast to two of the rusty and curtsying buoys. The captain stood by the wheel, smoking a curly pipe. A little dark man in shirt and breeches, speaking good English, engaged in a shouting dialogue with some official person on the quay.

"Can we get in this tide?"

"You'll have nine foot o' water in ten minutes. Get your ropes ashore."

"Unload to-morrow—what?"

"I should say so."

For the next half-hour there was activity on the deck of the *Sturm*. She carried the captain, four men and two boys. Ropes creaked and strained; a queer old capstan, worked by hand like an old-fashioned fire-engine, clanked and chattered. The *Sturm* was hauled in over the shelving mud bank till a long plank could be run from her to the stone coping

of the quay. A few loungers, hands in pockets, looked on. Some of them could never quite outlive a sense of surprise at seeing a German boat roped to the English quay. Most of them knew the *Sturm* very well by sight, and her square, bullet-headed skipper, who looked like one of the crew.

The hands of the harbour-house clock stood at half-past three. On this hot Sunday in August the town seemed to have gone to sleep, and but for a few boys who were bathing and the half-a-dozen loafers the grey stretches of the quay were empty. On a seat placed on the open and cobbled space in front of the harbour house a little woman dressed in black sat reading a book. She had watched the *Sturm* come up the river, had seen the white schooner roped to the quay, and the plank gangway put in place. Her eyes, of a curious amber brown, had a fixed attentiveness; almost they suggested the eyes of a sleek and watchful cat.

The Sabbath sloth remained. The loafers found a strip of shadow under the wall of an immense old warehouse with a roof like that of a tithe barn. The little woman on the seat closed her book, stood up, strolled towards the schooner, glanced at the figures on the deck, and then with a face of complete unconcern drifted away up a passage that led to the market square. The great square was empty save for two or three cars standing outside the Ship Hotel. The woman crossed the cobbled space. She looked very small, rather like a sturdy child going home after Sunday school, solemn, sedate, very neat in her little black cloche hat and clothes. She had a very round face, and a wonderful skin, the glow of an apricot. Her bobbed hair was the colour of honey, and two little tufts of it showed under the brim of her hat.

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In a back street that overlooked an ancient churchyard which had been closed for fifty years the woman stopped outside a small shop that was shuttered up for Sunday. A red letter-box let into the shop front showed that it combined the duties of a branch post-office with that of trade. On the fascia board above the shop was painted in white letters: "J. Ridding. Tobacconist—Confectioner." The little woman in black was J. Ridding. She unlocked the shop door and went in.

The blind of an upper window was raised. A face could be seen below the open sash-frame. Nothing moved in this back street save a cat that was gliding towards the rusty railings of the churchyard to hunt sparrows. Three big chestnut trees threw a kind of cool green gloam over the grey headstones and the brick tombs that rose out of the rough grass.

Mrs. Jenny Ridding sat down at the open window and watched the cat prowling among the tombs. Her thoughts were intermixed, and yet they all were threaded upon one central purpose. She reminded herself that it was very hot, the hottest day of the year. People were waiting for the cool of the evening. Presently there would be a loitering crowd of shopkeepers and young shop-assistants and servants upon the harbour quay. People who had nothing else to do would stand and stare at the German schooner and her German crew.

"A crowd's as safe as houses."

She made that remark to herself, watching the cat's serious movements in the grass.

"Oh—hurry up."

This appeal was addressed to the Sabbath sun.

"Oh—hurry up. Chuck it. You are keeping me waiting, you know."

On the schooner *Sturm* lethargy reigned. One man had changed into his shore clothes, the crew lounged and smoked; the two boys were playing a game of cards in a patch of shade on the deck; Captain Voss, in his shirt sleeves, spectacles on nose, was reading an old paper in his cabin.

A figure shut off some of the light that entered the cabin by way of the doorway. One of the crew was standing there, a thin man with high shoulders and a narrow face, a man who was quite un-

remarkable save for his eyes. They were like the eyes of a man suffering from starvation, or the eyes of a caged thing looking at life from behind iron bars.

Captain Voss glanced at him over the tops of his spectacles. He knew what the man wanted, and had he been some other than Captain Voss, the master of a German schooner, he might have humoured him, but with good-natured gruffness he trod—so to speak—on the man's toes.

"You can't go ashore, Tom."

"Not for five minutes, sir?"

"No."

"I won't go ten yards from the gangway."

"No."

"It is very hard."

Captain Voss exploded. He was feeling the heat, and being a good-natured man he did not like being hard; and because it hurt him to be hard he exploded.

"The devil! Get out—You are one of those fellows who when they are given one sausage want the whole string. Wasn't it agreed that if I took you on my boat—"

The man nodded, and his eyes continued to look with starved eagerness at the florid and vigorous Voss.

"You have been very kind—"

"Get out," roared the German; "you can't go ashore. Do you understand—?"

The man's eyes fixed themselves upon Captain Voss's old cap on the cabin table.

"Could she come on board, sir?"

"No."

"Not for five minutes—?"

Captain Voss brought his paper down with a smack upon the table.

"Come inside—listen—idiot. You wanted to look at England—and at someone. You went down on your knees, and being a fat fool—I— Oh, go to the devil! I'm a man with a family—"

He had dropped his voice to a cautious growl.

"Let you ashore? Not likely! That wasn't part of the bargain. How do I know that you would not bolt? I have to think of my ship and my family. They are very suspicious these days—over here. Those Bolsheviks always trying to sneak into a country. I have to sign that my crew is complete. A nice thing it would be for me if they found out I had had a fellow who had disappeared on shore—"

THE EXILE

Patiently, almost humbly, the man interrupted him.

"I shan't disappear."

"How do I know—?"

"I can't disappear. I'd be lagged—if they caught me. You know it. It couldn't be done, not for her sake. She's a good little woman. I—I've looked at her now—"

"Three times— Three times too much."

"But—skipper—I want to speak to her, just a dozen words. I'm starved."

Captain Voss, greatly disturbed, thumped the table.

"If you go ashore—I'll tell the English police. I'm not soft-headed."

There were people who saw King's Avon as a Dutch town. Its canal, running to join the river between lime trees and rows of old red houses, brought back to artists memories of Holland. The illusion spread from the houses to the people who dwelt in them, and when King's Avon sent out its citizens to stroll in the cool of a summer evening on the wharves and quays and under the lime trees it was with the soberness of people who live in a flat country. King's Avon's build was solid and short; it had no garrulity; it wasted neither gestures nor words.

Mrs. Jenny Ridding, joining herself to this sober idling crowd, drifted slowly towards the masts of the German schooner. There were other boats lying along the quay, and out in mid-stream two tramp steamers floated cheek by jowl. People idled about and stood and stared like big and serious children. It is good to be able to stand and stare in these days when everything goes with a mechanical click, and the other fellow gets ahead of you if your penny is not ready for the slot.

Jenny Ridding stood and stared. Below her, not fifteen feet away, lay the deck of the schooner. The man with the high shoulders and the thin face was hanging over the side, his chin resting on his folded arms. The woman stared at the man, and the man stared at the woman.

For more than three minutes this strange, intent scrutiny continued. They just looked and looked, both of them motionless and quite unconscious of all the other people. But of their surroundings they were conscious. A little strip

of water lay between a ship that was Germany and the stone-faced quay that was England.

Presently, without so much as a blink of those brown eyes of hers, the woman turned and began to stroll towards the swing-bridge where the railway track crossed the mouth of the canal. She walked slowly, looking at nobody. The man watched her little figure coming and going among the other figures. His sharp face had a starved look, as though food had been shown him and then been taken away. He remained quite motionless. And presently he saw the woman coming back. The evening sunlight caught one of those little tufts of amber hair. Her face glowed.

She paused again by the schooner, and again they looked at each other with glances that touched and grasped and yearned across that strip of water.

The man made the faintest movement of the head, shaking it. He put the back of his hand to his mouth.

The woman, turning to go, let something flash on him, a smile that might have been meant for the sunset, but it was his.

Later, when the stars came out, and the quay was deserted, Captain Voss had the gangway drawn in. He had been disturbed by emotion, and he carried a canvas chair up on deck, and sat down and smoked his pipe and listened. Some men are capable of soft-hearted recklessness. He heard light footsteps drawing little links of sound across the cobbles of the quay. Looking upwards he could distinguish a woman's figure outlined against the starlit sky.

Then, somewhere from the stern of the *Sturm* a voice rustled huskily:

"Jenny—Jenny."

The woman's figure moved until it was opposite the voice. There were whisperings across that strip of water. It made Captain Voss think of the rustling of dead leaves in winter.

He cleared his throat loudly. He stood up and spat into the river.

"Aach—himmel! Why is one soft headed?"

The whispering voices ceased, and Captain Voss, stumping along the deck, found the man standing in the shrouds. He swore at him.

"Come down out of that."

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The man came down, but Captain Voss saw that the woman had not moved. Obstinate creatures — women, especially little women!

He laid a large hand on the man's shoulder.

"Here, get out. I give you a couple of hours. If you are not back at midnight I'll go ashore and tell the police. Come to my cabin and show your face. Now, get out."

The man caught Voss's arm with his two hands.

"I'll come back. On my honour—after this."

Voss spat.

"Give me a hand with the gangway. Don't let that woman fool you—"

"She's my wife. I told you."

"I know all about wives," said the German.

When the man had scuttled over the gangway, and he had seen two figures become one under the stars, Captain Voss relit his pipe, and leaned against the schooner's side.

"Mein Gott—how they clung together! Well, well, I'm a sheep's head. If the fellow doesn't come back—?"

He supposed that he would have to inform the English police. He would owe that to himself, his ship, his family. He knew the fellow's history, and what could you do when such things had happened, and a man had become the sport of uncontrollable fear or of an overwhelming fed-upness? A very decent fellow too, quiet and reliable, not much

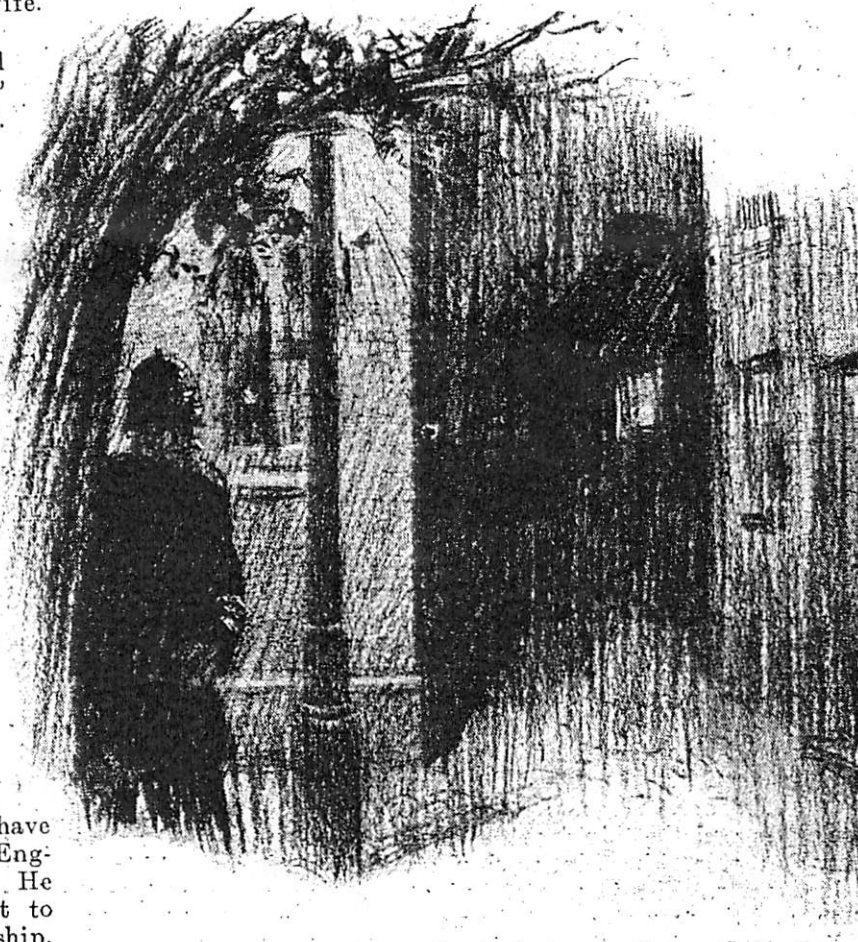
of a seaman of course, but willing as a good dog.

"What is the matter with Germany—anyway?" was the captain's final reflection. "If the fellow had become a German what is the wife going to do about it? Women are quick with scissors."

Being a hearty soul he began to feel sleepy. He felt drawn to his bunk, but meanwhile that fellow who had no right to be ashore was wandering about somewhere with a woman who was obviously determined.

"Aach—for courage—give me a little woman." And Voss yawned, spreading his muscular arms.

He went down to his cabin, but he did



He shadowed him to that back street

not undress. He lay down in his clothes, and reaching for the American alarm-clock that he kept hung above his bunk, he set the alarm for midnight. If he fell

THE EXILE

asleep and was roused by the clock, and that fellow Ridding had not returned—? Yes, certainly, he would go and inform the police.

Captain Voss left the lamp alight. He fell into a reverie, and the reverie landed him in sweet sleep, but he had been asleep less than an hour when he was roused by someone touching him.

It was Ridding. The man was bending over Voss's bunk. His eyes were shining.

"I'm here. Five minutes to twelve. God bless you."

"Oh, go to the devil!" said Voss. "Here, turn the light out. Ouch—I'm sleepy."

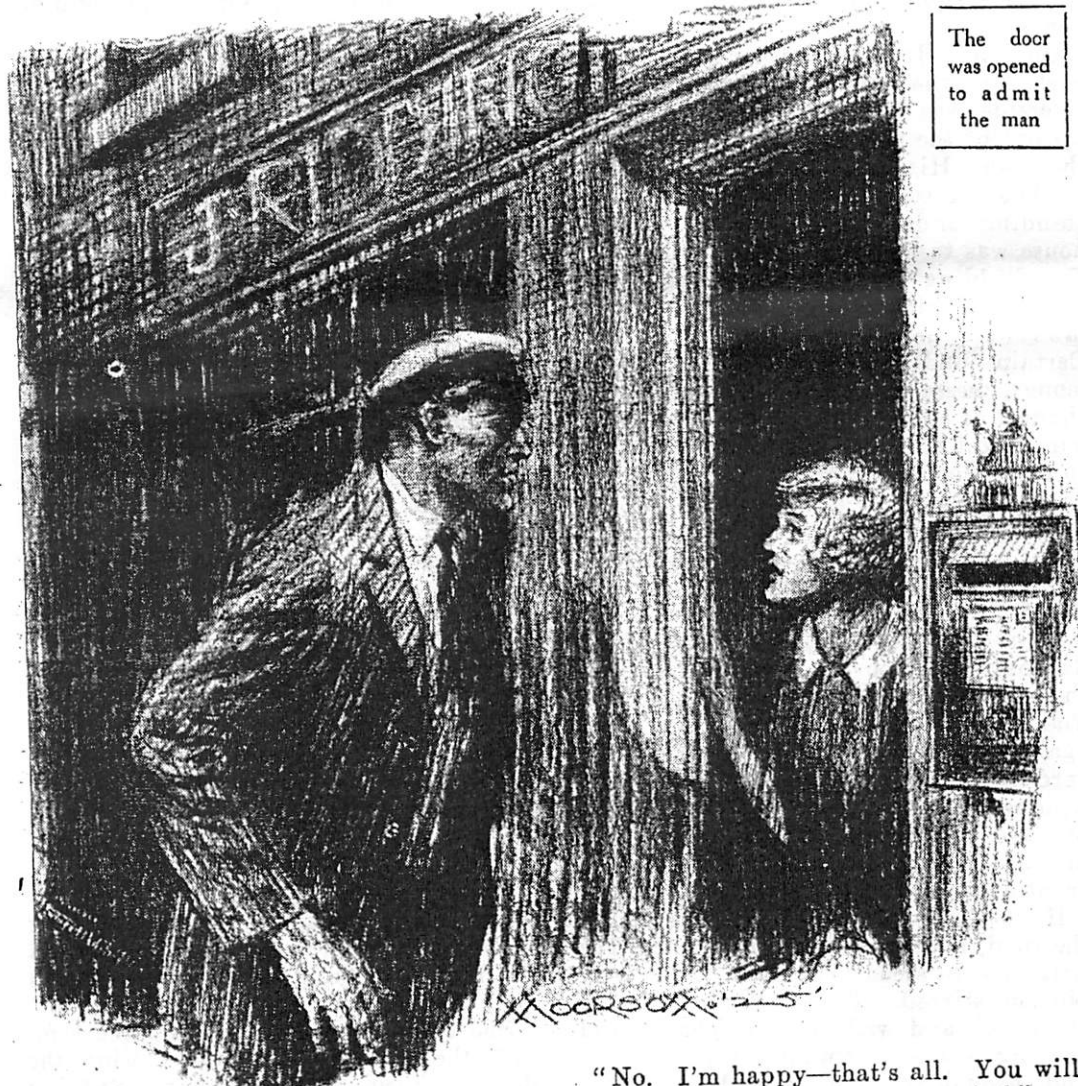
Ridding turned out the light, gave a dog-like look at the shadowy figure on the

Next day the *Sturm* unloaded her cargo, and Captain Voss, keeping two stolid blue eyes on the work, was aware of the man Ridding very brisk and busy, and somehow looking fatter and less starved.

Captain Voss grew suspicious. The fellow looked too cheerful, as though he had some plan in his pocket, and was ready to give all law-abiding people the slip; and towards the end of the afternoon, when Captain Voss saw that the schooner would be free to sail on the morrow, he called Ridding to him.

"You are up to some trick—what?"

His blue eyes threatened, but the Englishman smiled at him.



The door
was opened
to admit
the man

bunk, and disappeared to the forecastle where the rest of the crew were snoring.

"No. I'm happy—that's all. You will let me go ashore to-night, captain?"

"Himmel, no."

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"But I promise. I promise on the soul of your ship that I'll be back at midnight. Besides—don't you see—?"

"I see a sheep's head."

"She's good—the best little woman that ever was. Do you think I'd play tricks? Not me. She'd suffer. That's got me."

"You're supposed to be dead."

"Oh, worse than dead. Men who desert—! Suppose there wouldn't be any shooting now, but I'd be jailed. Five years—I reckon. Don't know. Not chancing that—for her sake."

"Oh, all right," growled Voss, "go ashore and be damned. But if you don't come back by midnight—"

"It's a promise to you, captain, and to her."

He went. He slipped ashore about half-past nine when night had fallen and the riverside was deserted. He disappeared up one of the narrow alleys leading into the town. His luck was in, or he thought so, but a certain watcher who had been standing under the shadow of a warehouse was to have a say in the matter of Tom Ridding's luck. Foreign ships were to be eyed with suspicion. Immigration laws were nets to be slipped through. Certain undesirable literature, letters, money, messages were for ever seeking a channel of entry. Collusion was easy. A man might slip ashore and pass a packet to some woman or other who was in the game, especially to a woman who did not challenge suspicion.

The watcher followed in Ridding's steps. He shadowed him to that back street, and saw him knock at the closed door of the little shop. The shop was in darkness; the door was opened to admit the man, and closed quickly after him. The watcher leaned a broad blue back against the rusty railings of the churchyard and, with his eyes on the upper windows, considered the situation. Someone had lit a lamp; the yellow blind of an upper window glowed in the dark flat front above the shop.

He waited an hour and then, crossing the road, knocked at the shop door. The little house seemed to hold its breath. No one stirred. The constable repeated the knock and with more emphasis, and hearing footsteps coming down the stairs and through the shop he held an electric torch ready.

Jenny Ridding opened the door.

"Who is it?"

A light had been flashed upon her face, and she could not see the constable.

"Good evening, Mrs. Ridding. I'm a police officer. You have got a man here from that German boat."

"Well—what if I have?"

"I'm not saying you have no right to, Mrs. Ridding, but I want to see the man."

She looked very white in the glare of the torch.

"I'm a respectable woman— What do you mean—?"

"Nothing at all, ma'am, but, in these seaport towns we have to keep our eyes open. I want to see the man and ask him a few questions."

She remained motionless in the doorway, a sturdy little figure confronting disaster. She kept her head. She seemed to take an inspired grasp of the situation. She smiled; she made way.

"Won't you come in? I'll light the gas. The man upstairs is my husband."

She had a box of matches on her, and as the gas jet flared she glanced quickly at the constable. He was a middle-aged man, not a youngster; she knew him by sight; he had served in King's Avon for some years.

"You thought I was a widow."

Her sturdy smile was confident.

"My husband is a German—these days. But he was a King's Avon man. I'll send him down. Please shut the door."

Her inspiration was to tell the truth, to put a brave face on it, and to trust to something better than her luck. She went upstairs to her husband who was sitting on the edge of a hard sofa and looking tragic and scared.

"Tom—it is the police."

"How many?"

"Oh—only one. Go down and tell him the truth."

Ridding stared at her.

"The truth!"

"That's my feeling about it. After all a man's a man, and we've done nothing wrong. Go down, Tom. Just you go and tell him everything just as though you were telling me."

She turned her husband into the shop with the man in blue and, closing the door on them, went upstairs. Ridding with his back to the counter confronted the constable, who stood by the door.

THE EXILE

"You know me—I reckon. I remember you."

The policeman nodded a large head. He was a big fellow, fresh coloured, with blue eyes and a fair moustache, a typical, kind English soul.

"It's Tom Ridding. You were supposed to be dead."

"So I am. I deserted. Oh, man, but the mud and the shells got me. Well—that's that! I hadn't the face to chance it. Besides, there's her. She's a good little woman—the best that ever was."

The constable stroked his moustache.

"You went over to the Germans."

"I was a bit off my nut—I reckon. But perhaps you don't know what it was like in front of Wypers in the autumn of seventeen."

"I was there."

"Pretty ghastly—wasn't it?"

"It was all that."

"Well—I did a bolt. I don't think I darned well-cared where I bolted to. I was like a rabbit off its nut. And afterwards—oh—I managed to wangle. The German's much of a man—as you or I am. But—I was homesick—I wanted to see her."

Again the policeman nodded.

"It's understandable."

"I got taken on by old Voss of the *Sturm*. He's a darned good sort. I was straight with him. He knew why I wanted to come. This is the third time. Well, what are you going to do about it? I don't want to get old Voss into trouble."

The policeman removed his helmet, ran a hand over his head, and helped himself to a cigarette from a box on the tobacco counter.

"Bit awkward, isn't it?"

Ridding struck him a match.

"Very awkward for me. I don't want her to have the shame of it. What's more—I've suffered. It makes you marvel how some things can pull at your guts."

The man in blue puffed.

"Look here, you don't carry any papers, Bolshie stuff?"

"I? I'm not a Red. You can look me over. I've just told you the truth as one man to another."

"That's all right, chum. I'm just doing a bit of thinking. You were going back to that boat?"

"I promised old Voss I'd be on board before midnight. I'm on my honour."

The man in blue nodded.

"Look here—supposing I shut my peepers—I'm a man as well as an officer. If you'll swear to go straight back to that boat—"

Ridding stood and quivered.

"I say—will you? You can take me back—"

"Call your wife down," said the policeman.

When Jenny Ridding heard the news she ran like a sturdy child at the man in blue and kissed him.

"You're a man—you are."

"I don't want to be hard-hearted. The law's the law—you know—Mrs. Ridding. Your man has had his gruelling. Seems to me I can let him alone."

He shook hands with them both.

"I'll wait down by the church. I'll give you five minutes, Ridding."

He walked out of the shop, and at the end of five minutes Jenny Ridding pushed her man through the doorway. They clung together for a moment.

"I'll see what I can do, Tom, dear. Maybe they'll let you back home. I'll find out. But if it's not safe—I'll come to Germany."

"You'll not do that," said he; "I'd give myself up sooner than you should do that. You're not a German woman."

He gave her a last kiss, and went swinging down the street, his hands stuffed into his pockets, his shoulders hunched up. The man in blue was waiting for him. They walked along together in silence.

On the deserted quay, above the dim white shape of the *Sturm*, Ridding pushed his hand into the policeman's big fist.

"If it wasn't for old Voss and her I'd give myself up," he said; "I want to be English again."

"That's in the blood."

"Supposing—? What would they do to me?"

"Don't know. Not much—I reckon. Coming over again?"

"Couldn't keep away."

"Look here—I'll try and find out. Our inspector's a nob at the law. He's a man too. So long, old lad."

"So long, sport," said Ridding with the look of a man who wanted to weep; "you're English—you are."

And he went on board to report to Captain Voss.

ROBIN HOOD

By WARWICK DEEPING

THE Ford car pulled up on the brow of the moor, and its occupant, a tall man in tweeds, got out and walked round the car, looking at the tyres. The Ford was a four-seater, and in the back seat, and disposed with an air of casual negligence, were two brown suit-cases, a heavy overcoat, a rug, and a white canvas bag full of golf clubs. The *raison d'être* of the car was obvious. The man was on a holiday, moving from place to place, and amusing himself by experiencing the adventures of new and strange golf courses.

He had pulled up to look at the tyres and the view, and perhaps there was no more splendid and lonely sweep of country than the Medlock Moors at sunset. Nothing moved on those great barren hills save a few sheep and the shadows of the clouds. They were covered with a rustiness that was heather and coarse grass.

The man climbed the bank and stood there against the sunset. He was slim and well built, and in age about five-and-thirty. He was ordinary, and yet not quite ordinary, for as he stood there on that high, sun-steeped and solitary hill there was something bird-like about him, a suggestion of hovering, of a falcon poised before a swoop. His face was aquiline in its sharpness and in its curves. There was something in him of fierceness and of accusation. Or he might have been standing upon the parapet of some trench and looking out over a battlefield.

A valley lay below, a wooded valley, and the level sunlight lay along the domes of its trees. It touched more than the trees, the greyiness of some old building, a turret, a row of battlements, a clock tower, gables. Medlock Abbey lay down yonder, and the man's eyes were fixed on it.

He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Seven o'clock."

He pulled out a pipe and a tobacco pouch and turned towards the car. It was an inconspicuous, an anonymous car.

Anyone might have passed it, and forgotten it a moment later, and no one would have troubled to glance at its number plate. The man smiled. He had a pleasant smile, and it effaced his look of intent and meditative fierceness.

"Like thousands of others," he thought; "that's the best sort of camouflage."

He was in the act of lighting his pipe when someone hailed him.

"Excuse me, will you please help?"

He turned rather sharply, with a shade of annoyance, but with no suggestion of being startled. He saw a girl. She had come up over the moor, and it was obvious to him that she had been running. She was out of breath. She was small and slight and curiously appealing, with red hair that had almost a touch of crimson in it, and two very dark eyes in a pale face.

"It's my dog," she said. "He has fallen down an old disused shaft. Can you help?"

"Of course."

He went with her over the moor. There had been some mining done here many years ago, and at the bottom of a depression in the ground he saw an opening fenced off with posts and rails. The fence was old and two of the rails were broken. From below came the yapping of a dog.

"It isn't very deep," she said.

He crawled under one of the rails till his head was over the edge of the shaft. It had been filled in to within about twelve feet of the ground, and he could see the dog, a white Sealyham.

"I don't think he is hurt. Hallo, old chap! All right; we'll fetch you out."

He got up, his pipe in his hand, and his eyes looked at her kindly.

"I have a tow rope up there. I always carry a length of rope when I am touring. I'll fetch it."

She watched him go and she watched him return. She had one of those soft, serious, Madonna-like faces in which the child and the woman meet, but when she smiled her solemnity seemed touched with

white light. There were times when she surprised people with a dignity and a determination which were unexpected in so seemingly fragile and exquisite a creature.

"I'm so grateful to you."

"Oh, that's all right!" he said, smiling.

They liked each other, and each was conscious of this instinctive attraction.

"Now, then."

He selected the strongest of the posts, knotted one end of the rope to it, and dropped the other end down the shaft. Crawling under the fence, he slid down the rope and disappeared from her view. A moment later she heard his voice.

"The dog's all right. Can you be ready to take him from me? I shall have to swarm up with one hand."

"Oh, I am so glad! Yes, I'll be ready."

She crawled under the fence and lay looking down into the shaft, her hands ready to take the dog from him when he climbed up.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

He swarmed up with the dog under his left arm, and in reaching out to take the Sealyham from him her hair touched his face. She flushed slightly, and getting up on her knees with the dog in her arms, wriggled her way under one of the broken bars and stood up.

"I'm so grateful to you."

He emerged and began to unfasten the rope, and she noticed a corner of torn cloth over his right knee.

"I'm afraid you have got in a mess."

"Oh, nothing to hurt! Won't you put the dog down, and we can see whether he limps."

She did so, and the pup was so little the worse that he began to tear round and round, barking uproariously, and ended by flinging himself against her knees.

The man was recoiling the rope.

"He's none the worse."

She glanced at his face, with its smiling eyes, and she was struck by its kindness, the gentleness of the big thing towards the little.

"No, thanks to you."

"I have enjoyed it," he said.

They walked back to the car, and as they reached it the yellow disk of the sun touched one of the western hills and a sheet of light lay all about them. The girl lingered. The man was putting the

rope away in a locker, and she noticed the golf clubs and the suit-cases, and she felt a desire to ask him his name.

"I am so very grateful to you," she said.

He turned to her, smiling.

"Oh, that's all right! I must be moving. It is rather lucky I pulled up here to enjoy the view."

"It was lucky."

He was adjusting the controls, and he went round to the front of the car and started the engine. She had a feeling that the little adventure was at an end, and that he was in a hurry to take the road. She stepped back, calling the dog to heel, and the man climbed into the car.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" she asked.

He gave her a quick look.

"Certainly. Snaith."

"Thank you."

She was about to respond by telling him hers, when he raised his hat and set the car gliding slowly forward down the road. It was almost as though he had meant to rebuff her.

"Good night."

"Good night. And thank you so much."

She watched the car disappear down the winding moorland road, and then, turning northward, over the moor, she began to make her way down into the valley.

"A79567. That's a London number," she reflected. "I suppose he is on his holiday. I wonder what he is?"

Snaith drove on for a couple of miles with the air of a man who is vexed about something. The fierce look had returned to his eyes, but there was less of the spirit of accusation in his fierceness, and more of a questioning gentleness. He had the air of arguing some point with himself.

"Sentiment, but not sentimentality, my friend. Be hard when you have a right to be hard. Are you going to let a pair of dark eyes and a pale face make you forget those others?"

He pulled up again and looked about him with the air of a man reconnoitring the ground before an attack. The valley road branched to the right about a hundred yards from where he had drawn up his car. The sun had set, and already the valley was filling with a shadowiness that was night, and the hills above showed black against the afterglow. Snaith saw a car on the road above, and getting out,

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he raised a bonnet flap and pretended to be examining his engine. The other car, a big landaulette, went by with a rush of wind, but he remained bending over his engine until it was out of sight.

He glanced at his watch and then stood listening. A clock in the valley struck the half-hour, the clock of Medlock Abbey. He nodded.

"About time."

He got in and drove on. He went up the next hill, turned in a field gateway, and coming back, took the valley road towards Medlock. It was growing dark now, and it was still more dark when the road entered the woodlands, for the branches of the trees almost met overhead. Snaith drove cautiously for a mile or so. He met no one, and he did not switch on his lamps. He drove still more slowly, watching for some landmark on the left-hand side of the road, and presently he saw it—the grey-green bars of an old gate, which closed the end of a woodland ride. He pulled up, got out, opened the gate, and returning to the car, drove it into the wood. Then he went back and closed the gate, and sitting down under a beech tree, remained there for half an hour, listening.

The silence satisfied him. He walked the fifty yards to where he had left the car under the blackness of the trees. He unlocked one of the suit-cases and took out a flat parcel, something wrapped in brown paper. A minute later he was changing the number plates of his car, working deftly in the darkness, as though this substitution had been done many times before.

After that he produced a packet of sandwiches and a flask, and sitting on the running-board, made a meal. He was in the midst of a great silence, the black silence of deep woodlands on a windless night.

Lady Joan Medlock slept badly that night. She woke about twelve o'clock, and after half an hour's restlessness she left her bed, and going to the window, pulled up the blind.

The coincidence of her doing this thing at this very moment was to be productive of the most fantastic of adventures. She was standing there in the darkness, when a finger of light flashed out momentarily from some window below her and traced a line of light across the lawn.

Now, Joan Medlock was the daughter of her father, that hard, ginger-headed little man who had fought his way up from a Lancashire shop to a peerage and many millions. She was his daughter in her courage and her obstinacy, but she lacked his devouring hardness. Old Medlock had been afraid of nothing, not even of an angry and half-starved mob, and his daughter did just what he would have done had he been alive.

She did not rouse the house. She slipped on her blue silk dressing-gown and her slippers and went downstairs (those immense stairs of which old Medlock had been so proud) with an automatic pistol in her hand. She had not the faintest idea how to use the pistol. It had belonged to her father.

At the foot of the stairs she paused to listen. She heard something, a sound which led her to the great Louis Quinze drawing-room, with its white panelling and its heavy, gilded furniture. The door was ajar. There was a little blur of light somewhere in the room. The switches were by the door frame, and Joan slipped a hand in and touched the first of them, which was connected with the huge chandelier hanging in the centre of the ceiling.

Instantly the room was one brilliant glare of light, and it showed her a man standing with his back to her over against the folding French screen, with its Flemish tapestry and gilded leather. He had been bending over a display case, which was full of trinkets and snuff boxes. He turned sharply towards the door, and she saw that he was masked.

For a moment neither of them spoke. Their astonishment was mutual. The man saw a slim, red-headed girl in a blue dressing-gown, holding a pistol in one small hand—the girl whose dog he had rescued on the moor. The girl saw a tall man in tweeds and a heavy overcoat; the bright light showed her that same rent in the cloth over his right knee. His mask was superfluous.

"Mr. Snaith!" she said, closing the door.

The man's attitude was equally surprising. He pulled off his mask and looked at her protectingly.

"Don't be afraid. There is absolutely nothing for you to fear."

"I'm not afraid," she said; and as though to show that she was not afraid

she sat down in one of the Louis Quinze chairs and laid her pistol aside on a Boule table.

They looked at each other.

"I'm not armed," he said.

"I thought that all modern burglars carried arms."

"I believe so. But, you see, I'm not quite a modern burglar."

"So you admit—"

He smiled at her, and she was aware of that peculiar kindness in his smile.

"I was always ready to face the fact that this adventure would end one day. It has ended. If you wish to call any of your servants—"

She made no movement. She was observing him with complete calmness. The little figure in the chair had a touch of regal dignity.

"You call it an adventure—just that?"

"It is more than that."

"Certainly. It is robbery."

"There are various sorts of robbery. Some forms of robbery are forms of forcible restitution."

"What astonishes me is your assurance. You ought to be feeling horribly uncomfortable."

"I'm not."

"I cannot understand that—in a man—who—"

He interrupted her. She was surprised to find in his eyes a look of accusation, a challenge.

"Wait. May I ask you a question? Do you feel perfectly comfortable?"

"I? Well, under the circumstances, yes."

He gave a glance round the room, this wonderful and royal room.

"Are you sure? May I tell Lady Joan Medlock—for I presume that you are Lady Joan Medlock—"

"I am."

"May I tell her that some of us who took part in a little adventure that ended three years ago are so horribly and fiercely uncomfortable that we have taken up outlawry for the sake of some who are broken."

Her eyelids gave a little flicker.

"You suggest—" she said.

He made a movement with his right hand, like a guide indicating some wonderful landscape.

"Look! This is a superb room. It is one of many superb rooms, and in this house lives a little girl whose father

once kept a shop. I'm not talking clap-trap. Lord Medlock was a great man in the matter of making money. I have it that he collected some ten millions during the War. Can you tell me if that is true?"

She nodded, and her pallor seemed to grow more intense.

"Quite true."

"And you inherited it?"

"I did."

He smiled down at her.

"Lord Medlock had no qualms. He was one of the men who was too strong for our illusions. We—had—illusions, we—who had suffered. But has Lady Joan Medlock no qualms? Is she happy and comfortable?"

"What right have you to ask me that question?"

"The right of a man whose career is at an end, a man whose disillusionment was so fierce and bitter that he and others with him chose the life of Robin Hood."

"Stop!" she said suddenly.

Her dignity rose to his challenge. That pale face of hers seemed to unveil itself and to shine with an obstinate and supreme sincerity. In this strange battle between them she wished to be fiercely fair.

"I will answer that question. I am not comfortable, not happy."

"Not as Lord Medlock was happy?"

"No."

His eyes lit up.

"I'm glad. It is possible that by failing here I shall not have failed completely."

She considered those last words of his, her hands resting on the gilded arms of the chair, her eyes slightly downcast, so that the shadows of her lashes lay upon her cheeks.

"You are one of those who hate," she said; "a Bolshevik, a Communist."

"Oh, no, I am not that!" and there was no heat in his answer.

"You envy—you hate all this."

"Do you think I hate beauty?" he asked her, "or that I grudge anyone beautiful things? I wish more beauty, more and more beauty in the world."

"Equality, everything cut up and divided round!"

He came a step nearer.

"Equality, no. Men are not equal. I—and those who work with me—do not ask for equality, but mercy, pity, under-

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standing, that the strong should help the weak, not trample on them——"

"As my father did!"

"Yes," he said, "as your father did."

She sprang up with a little gesture of fierceness.

"You dare to say——"

"Isn't it true? Can you deny it?"

Her eyes met his. He saw her eyelids flicker.

"It is true," she said.

She turned away; she began to move restlessly about the room, and he stood and watched her. Her red hair lay like fire upon the blue silk gown. He had a feeling that she was passing through fire.

"And so—you rob!" she said suddenly.

"We take back a few fragments from the feast which we did not share."

"For yourselves?"

"Oh, no, not for ourselves!" he said.

She was astonished, arrested. She came and stood under the great chandelier, where the lights shone among the hundreds of glass lustres. She looked full at him.

"Do you mean that you are philanthropic burglars, that you rob other people——"

"We do not call it robbery, but restitution."

"A useful word. And your victims?"

"Would you call Lord Medlock a victim?"

"Please leave my father out of the argument."

"But that's impossible. You wish to be logical?"

"I do."

"Your father accumulated millions while the broken men we help received a few pence a day. Was that fair? Try and put all prejudice aside and answer that question."

She hesitated. He saw her lips move.

"No, it was not fair," she said.

And then she turned on him fiercely.

"But—you! Tell me, does a double wrong make a right? Aren't you using the devil's tools?"

"We use them on certain people, on the people who would not let us use anything else. Besides, it is debatable——"

"No," she said, "no. But why—do you use them? Are there not other means, other channels? Never was more done than now."

"Miss Medlock," he said, "have you seen? Do you know? Have you experi-



He pulled off his mask and looked at her protectingly

enced? Broken lives, starved lives. They break while people are collecting facts in offices. Do you staunch blood by merely forming a society?"

And suddenly something seemed to break loose in him, a fierce and passionate anger.

"We had ideals. We came back full of the love of man for man, and such men as your father killed that love. Not all of them are like that, thank God. But I have seen the broken lives. We grow bitter, weary, some of us, in trying to help. Apathy! The hurry to forget! Can I forget what happened to me? I had nothing but my gratuity; it was filched from me by a commercial shark. I was but one of hundreds. My wife fell ill. I lost her. I should not have lost her if I had not gone to the War. I have been luckier since then; I have a niche in the world—"

He broke off. He seemed to remember himself. He gave a little laugh.

"Or rather—I had," he said. "Don't you think that we had better end this and rouse your servants? I won't cause you any trouble."

She looked at him intently.

"You accept the situation?"

"I do. I do not believe in violence. I shall accept the facts and say nothing."

"Nothing of what you have told me?"

"Not one word. The others will carry on."

"But supposing I tell?" she asked.

"You cannot tell," he said, "unless you are the child of your father."

She remained very still.

"You extraordinary man! Is it just vanity or the love of adventure?"

"Do you think I like breaking into houses?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know. My father was an adventurer, and his adventures were with cotton and coal and ships. But you! I know what I ought to be doing—the conventional thing, screaming up the stairs for the servants; but I am not going to do the conventional thing. Would you mind going out by the way you came?"

Their eyes met.

"You mean it?"

"I do."

He half turned to one of the windows, but she called him back.

"Wait! I can't quite see the right and the wrong in this. My father was

wrong; you are wrong; but am I wrong, in my own way, also? I want to think it out. If I let you go on parole, will you come and see me to-morrow?"

"Of course," he said, "if I can help."

"Where is your car?"

"In the woods."

"If I let you go—"

"I shall keep any promise. I can drive on to Telford and put up there."

She stood up.

"Come to tea to-morrow"

"I will."

He gave her a slight bow and turned again to the window.

"Good night, Lady Joan. Some people can be kind to their dogs, but you—"

"I want to convince you that you are wrong, Mr. Snaith—almost as wrong as my father was. Good night."

She saw him disappear through the window, and she closed it after him, picked up her pistol, switched off the lights, and went silently upstairs.

"Am I an idiot, or am I not?" she thought; "but if he comes to-morrow I think I shall believe in him."

He did come. He drove up to the abbey in that anonymous old car of his, with the golf bag and the suit-cases bundled into the back seat. He had resubstituted the original number plates, and he was wearing a different suit.

He was introduced to Aunt Mary, a pale copy of her dead brother, an apologetic little woman who whimpered in broad Lancashire. They had tea in the stone summer-house, whose classic portico gave on a great yew walk set with statuary—busts of Roman emperors and figures of athletes and dancing girls. Lord Medlock had been very proud of his statuary.

"Come and see Julius!" had been one of his jokes. "He would have made a fine mill owner, would Julius."

Presently Aunt Mary disappeared, for it had been her business in life to appear and disappear at the proper moment.

Lady Joan Medlock and Mr. Snaith wandered down to the terrace walk above the lake and watched the swans moving on the water.

"So you trusted me," she said.

"You thought I should vanish?"

"I was not sure."

She looked out across the lake to the open parkland and the rolling woods. Her face was austere, vaguely troubled.

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"Mr. Snaith," she said, "I'm the daughter of a business man; I'm Lancashire; I want results. If you could prove to me—"

"That we Robin Hoods have something to show? That we have not pocketed the proceeds?"

"Exactly."

He smiled at her.

"Certainly. I could take you over our factory. I could show you broken lives and lives that have been mended."

"Where?"

"Here, there, and everywhere."

"Would you show me?"

"With pleasure."

"When?"

"Say next week-end? You see, I work during the week and I am Robin Hood on Saturdays and Sundays. Would you come?"

"Yes, I'll come," she said. "Would it be possible for you, I and Aunt Mary to make a week-end tour in one of our cars?"

"I see no objection to it," he said.

And then he spoke with sudden intimate seriousness.

"Lady Joan, if you come you will see people who look on me as nothing more than an agent. We don't pose as the dispensers of complacent favours. I am supposed to be merely the agent of certain rich people who choose to be nameless."

"I understand," she said. "It is not one of the many forms of vanity!"

"No," he answered, "I hope not."

She went with him. Her big car spread its speed over half the Midlands and the south, with Aunt Mary sitting like a little yellow joss beside her niece. Whenever they paid a visit they left the car and Lord Medlock's sister in some non-committal corner of the town or village.

Joan saw things. She saw both broken lives and mended lives. She saw faces brighten to Snaith, and the kindness in his eyes. But it was a compassionate, disinterested kindness; it did not advertise the ego or rub its hands complacently with vain self-satisfaction. She would have hated him had he been smug.

"We are the poor ghosts of a world's broken promises," he told her. "Sometimes I think with the Jesuits—"

"No. I'm just plain Lancashire," she said.

But the conflict was bound to come, and it developed late on the Sunday after-

noon. They had run through Guildford and up over the Merrow Downs, and here Joan stopped the car to enjoy one of the finest landscapes in the south. She got out, and Snaith followed her. Aunt Mary seemed to understand that she was to remain in the car.

They wandered together across the turf and away from the Sunday crowd of cars and picnic parties. It was a blue day, with the pine woods almost black upon the further hills and the distant Sussex downs floating like ghost hills above the sea.

"Beautiful!" she said, standing at gaze.

And then she spoke of the thing that was in her mind, not looking at him, but still gazing towards the south.

"My father was wrong. And you, too, are wrong, though less wrong than he was. I feel it, without being able to put all I feel into words."

"He took for himself. We take for others."

"You are wrong," she said.

"I would like your reasons."

She remained silent a moment, faintly frowning.

"It's not that I'm a little middle-class girl with all the middle-class view of things. But aren't you mixing up love and hate, and using hatred as an excuse, a means?"

"You haven't learnt to hate."

"Mr. Snaith," she said very simply, "I hope I never shall. Has hatred—even a sincere hatred—ever helped the world? Is not the other thing the thing that matters?"

"Yes, if people had it. If your father had had it. But it is because men have made such a mocking shop of the love of man for man—"

"That you take their weapon and use it? You are wrong. Oh, I'm not a prig! I'd rather like to think of you as scrambling down that shaft to rescue a dog."

He looked at her. She was very calm, passionately calm, and somehow he felt that he had come up against the white wall of her determination. She would be unmovable, the little red-headed woman with her serious eyes and all her Lancashire stubbornness.

"So that's that," he said.

She gave him a sudden challenging look.

"But not the end. It is my move, I think."

"Please make it."

"You give up the hate in your business, or I shall close my account."

"You mean that you will hand me over—"

"I do."

He smiled.

"Thank you. If that is the only alternative—"

She shook her head.

"It isn't," she said.

She turned again to the landscape and pointed towards it.

"My father never saw that. He hadn't the eyes to see it. Perhaps I have. Don't let us be bitter. I think I told you that I was not happy; but isn't it possible that if I did certain things—"

He watched her face.

"What things?"

And suddenly her eyes met his.

"Let's bargain. You give up your hate, I give up my money—as merely my

money. Supposing you Robin Hoods came in out of Sherwood and joined with me."

At first he would not believe it. Phantasy seemed added to phantasy. Life did not work like that, save in sociological romances and American picture plays. He was standing on solid English chalk talking to a Lancashire girl whose father had begun life in a shop.

But she convinced him.

"We could call it the Medlock Trust. Don't you see the possibilities, how it might spread, what a force it would be in this world of hate and hurry and greed?"

"Good God!" he said. "There would be no other war memorial like it! A living thing, a hand, a heart, not some mere bit of stone set up in a dusty street."

"Well, help me to make it true," she asked.

"I will," he said.



WHEN SPRING COMES BACK

THE brook is choked with yellow leaves,
Acorns and rifled chestnut burrs;
Summer is gathered up in sheaves,
Another year joins the old years.

So short a time ago the spring
Came laughing through the April rain,
The credulous heart did naught but sing,
And painted hopes sailed by again.

'Ah, what a year it was to be
Of purpose ripening in the sun!
And what a year of love, said we;
And now the year is almost done;

Little is ours of it to spend—
Some sapless days of glory reft,
The heart so shadowed by the end,
It hath no joy in what is left.

Yea, naught remains but as before
To dream, the waiting winter through,
That, when the spring comes back once more,
Next year—ah, next!—But what of you?

RICHARD LEIGH.

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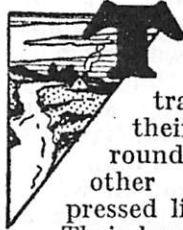
THE CORNER
JAN 1924

JIM AND BILL

32

By WARWICK DEEPING

SOUTH AFRICAN DIAMOND DIGGINGS—THE MAN WHO MADE GOOD



HEY stodged about in the blue clay within three yards of each other, contrasts in everything save in their muddiness. One was burly, round-headed, blue of eye; the other hollow-chested, with compressed lips and a face like a hatchet. Their boots and breeches and hands were smeared with mud, and their shirts and faces speckled with it. Both boasted cut-throat beards, and about them were hundreds upon hundreds of other men, as intent and as muddy and as eager as they were. The blue, squelching, saucer-shaped hollow in the hill was full of blasphemy; there were times when the voice of it seemed to utter one great oath.

Bill Baxter of the blue eyes had been puzzled by the man who worked the half claim next to his, and by way of cracking the nut of acquaintanceship, had planted a vast and playful fist in the middle of the other's chest.

"What ho!—Skinny!"

Whereupon the thin man had opened his mouth like a fish out of water, fallen forward over his bucket of mud, and had began to cough as though he had meant to go on coughing for ever.

"I'm not strong enough for that——"

"Sorry, old dear! I didn't mean to be rough."

A strong man may despise physical weakness, or be touched by it, and in Bill's case the resultant took the direction of a protective pity. "Here, stand up, old son!"—and James Hammersley, helped to his feet, had smothered his coughings and smiled. "You knocked the wind out of me, you know."

He had queer, violet coloured, dog-like eyes, and they were the human points in his thin face—"Like the eyes of a gal, almost." Maybe Jim's eyes did the trick with Bill Baxter, but that day James Hammersley became Jim.

Bill, the blackguard, felt fatherly towards him. He was such a skinny devil, rather finicking at first, and very raw in the handling of his tools. A broken-down gent—obviously. And he was silent—amazingly silent—and his lack of language

would provoke Bill into throwing occasional and playful clods of clay at him.

"Say, can't you cuss?"

"I leave that to you, old chap. I have to save my breath, you see."

It was true, and Bill observed the truth of it. The chap had arms like broomsticks, but he worked like one possessed, sighing and panting, his face twisted to match his effort. At times his face had the blue tinge of the clay, and when he carried his buckets down the track to the washing-table his shoulders sagged under the weight of them, and the veins stood out on his thin arms.

It was a rough world and a simple, elemental in its emotions, molling in the mud, quick with an oath or a blow or a friendly smack of the hand. Round Jim and Bill worked all sorts of men from all sorts of countries. West of Bill Baxter Tim Malone, a red-headed, green-eyed Glasgow Irishman slaved like a morose, suspicious and tricky fiend, the most quarrelsome man on the hill, but surly and dead-eyed when near Bill Baxter. East of Jim a little round Dutchman had his patch. Stodging on all sides were Englishmen, Yankees, Frenchmen, Germans, Danes—an international hotch-potch, greedy for the little things that glittered. The laughter of this rough world was against Jim; he was the sort of absurd, striving, rather pitiful creature who never drank or swore, and who would never have any luck; but this rough world left him alone because Bill Baxter had claimed him as his pal.

"Say, where you sleeping?"

It appeared that James had imitated Diogenes. For lack of any better habitation he had come by a barrel, which, stuffed endwise against a bank somewhere in the outer solitudes, served him as a home.

"You'll come out o' that; you ain't a dog!"

Jim came out of it, for Bill was something of a plutocrat and owned a real hut in which there was room for two bunks, and from that date Jim occupied one of them. They slept and ate and worked together, though Bill had to do the drink-

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ing for both of them, which he did with galliard thoroughness. The blackguard was always down at one of the saloons, drinking, fighting, laughing, spilling money about, and yet this blackguard undertook the education of James Hammersley and taught him to see life as it is. Not the life of tea-cups and texts, but the life of strong men digging for adventure, tearing fate out of the bosom of the earth.

Jim's silence grew less obvious to Bill, though a month passed before Bill discovered that Jim had been a parson. "The Rev. James Hammersley, oh—lord!" Bill was nothing if not direct, but his directness was softened by his pal's sombre and sorrowful face.

"What's it matter what a chap is here anyway?"

Jim asserted with fierceness that it did matter.

"Done time?"

Jim's miserable eyes answered the question.

"Buck up, that's nothing! Half the swine who ought to be hanged have both feet in the trough. What was it—women and spoofo, or a bit of both?"

Jim supposed it was spoofo.

"I was tempted. I had reasons. I fell."

"And now you are getting up again, old son."

Hammersley sat and stared at the wall. "I misapplied money—an old woman's money. One of my children was ill."

"Did the money save the kid?"

Jim nodded.

"Well, that's all right. And what the hell are you doin' out here?"

"I'm after money to pay back money."

"And your wife and kids?"

"Man, I have got to put them right with the world!"

Bill understood. Plain to him was the panting grimness of this high-strung, blue-eyed boy digging in the mud for a new life and a new beginning. The obvious thing for a decent man loving God to do was to pack Jim's claim with diamonds and to send him back homewards singing Hallelujahs. But the Deity did not appear to be contriving it that way, for Jim as a digger had had no luck at all, and his clay patch had presented him with nothing but a few poor stones, the value of which did no more than pay for his food.

Bill considered the problem, and then fell sick. He put his sickness down to tinned salmon, but the doctor called it dysentery, and hinted that Bill took too much drink. Anyway he lay there in the

hut and lived on ipecacuanha and tinned milk, while Jim nursed him, and carried on as best he could down in the clay pit, looking after Bill's claim and his own. His immediate neighbours were better Christians than many whom Jim had known at home, all save Tim Malone the red-headed Glasgow Irishman with the flat and evil eyes.

Now these claims in the diamond pit were not much bigger than postage-stamps and every bit of the blue clay was precious, so that when the Rev. James Hammersley discovered Tim Malone doing a little surreptitious undercutting of Bill Baxter's claim he stood up and reproved him.

"You mustn't do that, you know."

The Irishman turned on him like a devil.

"F'what's that you're saying?"

Jim, rather white about the gills, repeated the accusation.

"You must respect another man's claim."

Malone whirled across and knocked Jim down.

"I'll respect ye!"

The neighbours stood up to watch. It was obvious that Skinny could make no fight of it with the flat-eyed Celt, and they did not expect him to make a fight of it, but that was just what Jim did. He got up with a muddy face and a slight quivering of the chin, and put up his sticks of arms. Malone fetched him a wicked blow in the chest, and Jim went down again and lay there squirming, while Malone spat, and went back to his own claim.

"If I see ye here to-morrer," he said, "by gob, I'll be killing ye!"

Jim picked up himself in due course and went on with his work, but that evening he carried back to the hut a superfine black eye. Bill noticed it at once, and sat up in his bunk, for Bill was growing vigorous and tired of ipecacuanha and tinned milk.

"Say, how did you come by that?"

Jim lied.

"Slipped and fell on my shovel."

"You silly kid!"

Next day James Hammersley walked down to his claim in the pit, and found Malone sitting on an upturned bucket and smoking a stumpy pipe. The other men were hard at work, but Jim was aware of an atmosphere of curiosity and expectation, and Malone's flat eyes were ugly.

"F'what are you doing here?"

"I'm here to work," said Jim.

"Call me a thief, will ye?"

Jim, very white, stood up to him!

"That depends on your respecting another man's claim."

Malone got up off his bucket and stood over him.

"Take back that lie."

"It wasn't a lie, and you know it."

Malone knocked him sprawling, but Jim got up, and staggering on his thin legs, put up his ineffectual fists. His second dose was the same as the first, but he took it standing, and Malone left him flat on his face with a bucket of clay stuffed on the back of his head.

The little Dutchman murmured.

"Eef hees big friend were here you——"

Malone turned on him, and the Dutchman's eyes flickered.

"I tell ees big friend."

"You go to hell!" said the Irishman.

Jim went back that night with a second black eye, and all explanations were unnecessary, for he found Bill sitting on the edge of his bunk, and the little Dutchman sitting on Jim's.

When Jim appeared Bill put up a great fist and swore at him.

"You blamed fool, getting yourself knocked about by that red-headed swine! Come here. I guess he's hurt you."

The little Dutchman gave Jim a shove, and Bill caught Jim and laid him like a baby across his knees.

"I could spank you—for standing up to that blighter for the sake of a big black-guard like me. Falling on your shovel, indeed! Here, Vanderkoop, you'll find a bottle and glasses in the cupboard. If it hadn't been for this nice gentleman, my son, I suppose you'd have been telling me you had slipped down and cracked your head on a bucket!"

He gave Jim a bear's hug, and sat him down beside him on the bunk.

"Make it a good one, Vanderkoop. We'll drink my pal's health. Here's to you, my son. As for Tim Malone, I'll soak his stinking carcass for him."

Afterwards there was some talk between the three of them, Vanderkoop's face growing more shiny and sly, what with the liquor and Bill's generalship. They arranged it all nicely for Malone, and when Jim went down to the diggings next day, and found the Irishman waiting for him, sitting on a bucket, the row that the bully was waiting for never matured. For directly Malone got up and made for Jim he found lumps of clay coming at him from all the quarters of the compass.

"You let him alone. Bill's coming down to-morrow."

Malone, pated with clay, ground his teeth at the interfering crowd.

"F'why then he call me a thief?"

"Ask Bill Baxter," came the retort.

Malone went back to his claim, but he was a vicious beast, and if he could not hurt Skinny with his fists, he decided to try and hurt him with his tongue. The "diggings" had come to know that Jim had been a parson and that trouble had befallen him. Most of the diggers had experienced that sort of trouble, but to James Hammersley the smart of it was different. Yet he managed to pull out a smile when Malone asked his "dearly beloved brethren" to tell him whether Hammersley had been quodded for picking dollars out of the offertory plate or pinching one of the communion cups. Jim took the bitter chaff, and threw the truth back.

"No; a dirtier trick than that, Mr. Malone."

"Perhaps you'll be for telling us——"

"I will. I took an old woman's money, and I'm here to get it back for her."

After that there was silence, and queer looks of respect from some of the muddy men. Malone, continuing to be facetious, was roughly told to turn off the patter. If he did not know a sportsman when he saw him, well—that was his fault, and Mr. William Baxter might have something to say about it.

Bill had. He arrived one morning with a smile in his blue eyes and the air of a man attending a ceremony. Malone was down in his mud hole, his short pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth, his shoulders sulky and self-conscious. He knew by the way the other men had stopped their work and were looking interested that a strenuous five minutes lay before him.

"Here—you! Come out of that, you—the swab with the red hair!"

Jim held his friend's coat. The affair was conducted with all ceremony, the crowd adjourning to a piece of level ground beyond the diggings, and there Bill and Tim Malone set upon each other with complete fury. But the Irishman's fury was founded on fear, and when the first flame of it had failed to scorch up the soul of his enemy, he fought wildly and hit low. The crowd bayed at him, while Jim stood and shivered and bit the collar of his pal's coat, for Bill's face looked very white, save for the blood on it, and Jim misread its whiteness.

Then, quite suddenly, the affair was over. Jim could not distinguish the blows that ended it. He saw Malone's head and shoulders sinking down, and Bill bending over him and jabbing upward blows into

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the Irishman's face. Malone seemed to go to sleep. He was down, lying on his back, and staring stupidly at the sky. The fight was over.

Jim put Bill's coat over his shoulders.

"Mind you don't get a chill, old chap. You have been out of bed less than a week."

Bill threw back his big head and laughed.

"D'you think I had better go home and change my shirt, Jimmy?"

"I do. I'll rub you down with a towel."

"Great snakes!" said the big fellow. "I must be growing a bit soft in the head."

But though Bill Baxter could father James Hammersley and take vengeance

faces of his children while God looked down from behind a golden cloud. God's job was not a bad one—anyway. At least, that was what Bill thought.

Then, Jim fell sick, and Bill, ceasing from all saloons, took to nursing him. Jim had it in his mind that he was going to die, and that he would die without finding his diamonds, and that the old lady would never get her money, or his wife and children their second chance. Bill stood sturdily in the path of his sick pal's pessimism. He worried the doctor



The bully found lumps of clay coming at him from all the quarters of the compass

upon any man who set out to hurt him, he was quite unable to influence Jim's luck, and to make diamonds appear in the clay of Jim's claim. Bill was a simple soul, with a love of the dramatic, and the proper dramatic ending to Jim's romance seemed lacking. The Deity was missing an opportunity. The luck of the thing should be so arranged that Jim should come upon a piece of clay stuffed with stones of phenomenal size, and should go home and embrace his wife and kiss the

until the doctor unleashed a terse tongue, and told him that James Hammersley would cease to be sick when he ceased to worry.

"There's nothing wrong with him—now."

"He's breaking his heart, doc."

"Tell him to give up breaking it."

Bill was quite innocent of blasphemy when he decided that the Deity was making a mess of Jim's case, or not troubling to handle it seriously. If God would not

mend Jim, then someone would have to depute for the Deity, or perhaps—after all—that was God's way of doing things.

"He's putting it up to me! Maybe there's something in it."

Then, Bill had a rush of luck. He came upon a little pocket in his claim that was stuffed with stones as a pudding is stuffed with currants. It was amazing. And the stones were good stuff, mark you, for the Jews who knew Bill's thirstiness were soon waiting to stand him drinks.

Bill looked grim. He had a serious and a passive air, and when people bothered him he growled like a dog with a bone. His stroke of fortune seemed to have had the most unexpected effect on him, for the fact was the Deity had gone and hidden the stones in the wrong claim.

One night Bill called five or six of his neighbours together, and after swearing them to secrecy, stated his case.

"There's been a mix up. Those shiners ought to have been in Jim's claim. He came out to get 'em, and he wants them more than me. I ain't got no wife or kids."

And then he made the most extraordinary statement.

"Look here, I want you boys to back me up in this. Jim's as innocent as a lamb. I'm going to stuff three-quarters of them stones into Jim's claim early on the morning he starts work again. He'll find 'em, see? I want you boys to be on to it, and to help it seem natural like."

There was an astonished but sacred silence, and then they all shook hands with Bill.

"You're a God's own pal, William."

"Don't you let on, any of you. Jim's that sensitive he wouldn't take a blasted stone."

That was how Bill Baxter staged it, dancing a few provocative brilliants under Jim's nose as he lay a-bed, and invoking his friend's future good fortune by crying up his own.

"Five thousand gold pounds' worth of stuff in an hour, my son. There you are; look at the beauties. And what's happened to me is going to happen to you."

Jim reacted to the stimulus of his friend's optimism, and to the proof positive that such wild streaks of luck were to be struck within two yards of his own claim. At the end of the week Bill had him out of bed, and down at the diggings. It was a dramatic morning for James Hammersley and for all those who shared Bill's secret. Vanderkoop the Dutchman, primed as to his part, strolled on to Jim's claim, and casting a critical and friendly eye over the clay, became sud-

denly enthusiastic over the possibilities of a certain patch of soil. Jim filled his bucket. Bill and Vanderkoop, fraternally interested, went down with him to the washing-table.

And that evening Jim was a rich man, in that he was worth more money than he had ever dreamed of possessing. He appeared bewildered, and his eyes were full of a dazed brightness.

Bill had gone across to see the doctor, and when he returned to the hut he peeped in through the window and saw Jim on his knees beside his bunk, giving thanks to God.

"Bless him," said the big man, "that's me, only he don't know it!"

When Bill opened the door Jim had got up off his knees and was sitting on his bunk with a photograph in his hand. He looked steadily at Bill and smiled, and then gently tapped the photograph with a thin fore-finger.

"I have been asking her advice. She agrees that you and I are going to share this great stroke of luck."

Bill stared.

"What, go halves?"

"Yes."

"Rats, my son! What should I do with the money? I've got more than I want."

Jim got up and laid a hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Old chap, I shouldn't have stuck this out if it hadn't been for you, and I want you to share."

"I won't," said Bill doggedly. "But say, I tell you what you can do. Settle my share on the kids. I'd love it."

"Honest?"

"Let 'em call me Uncle Bill."

So, Mr. Baxter became an uncle, and sitting down on Jim's bunk, he talked to Hammersley like a father and a brother and an uncle.

"You shin down to Cape Town, my son, and take a boat and pay the old lady, and come back out here with the wife and the kids. I reckon a good man's wanted in these parts. Parson Jim! And why not? Don't it strike you that us rough-uns are more likely to listen to a chap who has been through it and made good. Man's talk, my son, no pup-snuffle. You're the man for the diggings."

Having delivered himself of this admirable homily, Bill went off to the saloon and celebrated, and came back at midnight very drunk, and Jim got out of his bunk and helped Bill to bed, lovingly and without patronage. For that was one of the things that James Hammersley had learnt.

not to think a man bad because he was human.

Bill took a holiday and saw Jim off on the boat from Cape Town.

"Mind you come back!"

"Of course I'll come back," said Jim, rather white about the mouth, his hands set hard on the rails.

James Hammersley was absent for six months, and when another boat landed him at Cape Town, he had a little, cosy, brown-eyed woman with him and two small girls. They looked very happy. The new life had begun.

James Hammersley established his family at Cape Town in a quiet hotel run by a Dutchwoman, and took the train for Kimberley, saying that he was going to fetch Uncle Bill Baxter to make him known to Kitty Hammersley and Grace and Joan. Even in those six months Kimberley had changed, and the diamond hill had ceased to be a hill and had become a huge, sunken crater. It swarmed, it overflowed; it met Jim with many strange faces, and with men who stared, and who knew not the name of William Baxter. It seemed a monstrous thing to Jim that no one knew Big Bill, or could say what had happened to him.

Hammersley continued his search. He was speaking to a tall, bearded digger whose face was vaguely familiar, when a little round man, all shiny and smiling, came and thrust a hand at him. It was Vanderkoop, the Dutchman.

"Where's Bill?"

Vanderkoop's round face grew solemn. "Bill? He died two months ago. He's buried down there in the cemetery."

Vanderkoop took Jim and showed him William Baxter's grave. And since Bill was dead and almost forgotten, the little Dutchman felt that he had a right to pass on Bill's secret to the man who had not forgotten him. So Jim heard how Bill had hidden his own stones in his friend's claim, and had gone out of this world praising God and good whisky.

"He died of the typhoid. He was a great man was your Bill."

Jim had nothing adequate to say. He returned to Cape Town and to his wife and two children.

"Well, did you find your friend?" his wife asked him.

Hammersley smiled. His wife was aware of the shine in his eyes.

"He's dead, but the soul of him, Kitty," said James Hammersley, "is going to walk the world with me till I die."

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Nothing so Common

"I HEAR that your son is a great student, and spends most of his time over the midnight oil," said the vicar's wife, who was paying a first call on Mrs. Cumrox, whose profiteer husband had just settled in the village.

"Not a word of truth in it," declared the good lady. "We 'ave electric light all over the house, an' 'Erbert 'as a 'ole chanticleer in 'is room!"

* * *

What Hopes!

"I WANT to get my silver teaspoon back. It belongs to my best set," wailed an excited woman to the clerk at the Town Hall.

"But, madam, we don't know anything about your spoon," he protested.

"Oh, yes, you do!" she replied. "I must have put it in my dust-bin yesterday by mistake."

A Difference

THE colonel was putting the finishing touches to his new concrete pathway.

Little Lionel, aged six, had been watching the proceedings with great interest, and at length, deeming the time had come for trial, started to cross before the mixture was dry. When the colonel displayed his just anger, a neighbour observed:

"Why, colonel, I thought you liked children."

"So I do, in the abstract," the man of war replied; "but not in the concrete."

* * *

Amended

PROUDLY the efficiency expert gazed upon his completed work. Over every desk in that great financial office hung the motto:

"Do Him Now."

Merrow's Wife

By Warwick Deeping

33

"The stars were out when Merrow saw his wife descending the white steps of the portico. He went to meet her, and she put her hand in his. She was very pale. The soft solemnity of her face made him think of her as he remembered her on her wedding-day, walking up the dim, village church to him"



R. FIELD, of Lincoln's Inn, asked Jimmy Merrow two questions. He sat wagging his pince-nez and jigging a foot, and his voice was as abrupt as his movements.

"No use going further into the matter, Mr. Merrow, until I have asked you these two questions. Both important. One more important than the other."

"Very well, sir."

"Can you speak Italian?"

"Yes."

"How well?"

"Well enough to be attached to the Italian staff, sir, during the War."

"And are you married?"

There was the faintest flickering of Jimmy Merrow's eyelids.

"No. Does it matter?"

"Your being unmarried matters."

"You mean, sir—I ought to be married?"

"The opposite. The Marchese has certain prejudices, and the most determined of his prejudices is—no woman on the estate—within five miles of his villa."

Merrow's blue eyes looked grave.

"I see, sir. Really serious—is it?"

"Final as fate."

"I suppose there is an agent's house, sir?"

"Yes, half-a-mile from the Villa Panormo. The letters and recommendations that you have produced, Mr. Merrow, are exceedingly satisfactory. The Marchese, being

half-English, prefers an English agent. As I said—the appointment rests with me."

"Quite so, sir."

"I will let you know the result of this interview by the morning post to-morrow."

Jimmy Merrow stood up and blushed.

"I hope you will see your way, Mr. Field. It means a very great deal to me."

Old Mr. Field smiled at him; he liked the lad.

"I think it will be 'yes,' Mr. Merrow. Good morning."

In their shabby lodgings in a shabby street somewhere near Euston Station Merrow's wife was waiting for him, a dark girl, slim, graceful, with a delicate oval face, and eyes that combined fire with gentleness. She saw Jimmy Merrow come up the steps in that one really decent suit of his, which she had brushed so carefully before he had gone forth to interview the momentous Mr. Field. These young things were hard up; they had been hard up ever since the War.

Kitty Merrow did not rush at him. She stood in the middle of the room and waited. His blue eyes expressed both excitement and trouble.

"Well, Jimmy—?"

He put his hat and gloves on the table.

"Think I've got it, Kitty. A job after all these months. Very decent old boy, Mr. Field. It will be something to have been offered a job, even in the end if you have to refuse it."

Her dark eyes dwelt upon his face.

"Refuse it! But why?"

He looked uncomfortable.

By Warwick Deeping

"The Marchese is an eccentric. Appears he won't have a woman about the place. His agent has to be a bachelor."

"And you told Mr. Field——?"

Merrow sat down on the shabby sofa. He looked sad.

"I did. I am to hear the result to-morrow. Old Field seemed to think that he would give it me. The fact is, Kit—I wanted to feel what it was like to get a real job—at last. Of course I shall have to tell Mr. Field. It can't be helped."

She stood looking down at him, serious, slightly frowning.

"But what a monstrous stipulation! No man should have the right to make such a stipulation. And the pay, Jimmy?"

"Four-hundred a year and a house, and my travelling expenses to Panormo."

She went to the window and stood looking out at the shabby street, one hand laid along her cheek.

"Italy—a job——! Need you, Jimmy? The man is asking something tyrannical."

"What do you mean, Kit?"

"Take it and say nothing."

"But you——?"

She smiled at the shabby street.

"I could go to Aunt Mary's for six months."

"What!—leave you behind? I'm blown if I will!"

"But you can't take me, Jimmy. And it's a job, money."

"But—Kit!"

His troubled, boyish face brought her quickly to the sofa. He was so very young in worldly wisdom, a year younger than she was.

"Jimmy, smile; don't look so serious. I am not going to stand in your way. Besides——"

She sat down beside him.

"Besides—all sorts of things can happen in six months. You will get to know the Marchese. He may be quite—— Oh, well, you'll find out. Supposing he likes you and you get on well there, you could say that you wanted to get married. He might be nice about it."

"And supposing he should be nasty?"

She drew his head against hers.

"You could resign. But the thing is not to be in a hurry, Jimmy dear. Let's freeze on to the one definite thing—the job. Six months' breathing space—and then——"

He held her close.

"I don't like it. It seems a mean sort of thing to do, leaving you at home. You would love Italy."

"Of course I should. But it is Mr. Marchese who is doing the mean thing. And if you play your cards well, Jimmy—don't you see——? He may not be such an absolute curmudgeon. You will be able to come and fetch me."

She had spirit and a sense of humour. She tweaked her young husband's hair.

"Go and play your cards, Jimmy; you will be playing for me. Why, it is a regular adventure. I can pull through six months."

Merrow kissed his wife.

"By Jove, you are a sportswoman! I'll have a shot at it—for your sake—Kit."

So Jimmy Merrow left for Italy, and Kitty went to her aunt's at Beaconsfield, and Mr. Field had written to John Jermyn, Marchese de Panormo, stating that he was sending out Captain James Merrow to act as the Marchese's English agent. Captain Merrow's references were all that could be desired. Also, Captain Merrow was unmarried and could speak Italian.

About sunset the train left Merrow at Castello Station. He had wired from Genoa, and a car was waiting for him. The chauffeur was English, a laconic person with a mouth that seemed to have no upper lip, and a pair of grey-blue eyes.

"This all your luggage, sir?"

"Yes."

The road skirted the sea, and in the wonderful dusk of that spring evening sea and sky met in a magnificent deep-blueness. A white town under the hills gleamed like marble, and almost before the dusk had deepened into night a huge full moon rose above a purple headland. Merrow felt strange,

Merrow's Wife

and even the beauty of the night was strange to him. He began to talk to the chauffeur.

"Far to go?"

"About fifteen kilometres."

"Lonely sort of place—I hear?"

"Yes, it's pretty lonely."

"You are not married—I suppose?"

The chauffeur gave him a queer, quick look.

"Not me. Bloomin' monastery. Peaceful—though. No one to nag you."

Merrow was wondering whether he could ask the man more questions, but decided that there was wisdom in holding his tongue. In a day or two he would have seen things for himself and have come somewhat nearer to the why and the wherefore of Panormo. He watched the sea and the moon, but presently the white road lost itself in a black forest of chestnuts and pines. The moonlight splintered through. High up against the sky he saw a hill crowned by the gaunt bulk of a castle.

"Is that Panormo—up there?"

"That's the old place, sir. A ruin. The villa is nearer the sea."

"And the agent's house?"

"About half-a-mile from the villa, sir."

For all his round head and blue eyes and bright colour Jimmy Merrow was a sensitive lad, and when the car shot out of the forest into the full moonlight, and Merrow saw Panormo lying between sea and sky and bathed with a double mystery of moonlight and moonlit sea, he was conscious of a little tremor of wonder. He saw the villa on its headland in a smother of cypresses and fruit-trees, a dim, white house among dim, deep gardens. What manner of man was he who lived alone here amid such beauty?

The chauffeur was speaking.

"My orders, sir, are to drive you to the villa and wait."

"The Marchese wishes to see me—at once?"

The man nodded.

Fruit-trees overhung the road. There were steep walls, and climbing plants tumbling over them like

unfurled shadows, and a fragrance that seemed to fall out of the sky. A bell—high up somewhere—smote with its clapper eight solemn, musical strokes. Merrow found himself on the steps of a white portico. A man came out to meet him, an Italian, wearing a sort of dark habit like a monk's.

"Welcome, sir! My master expects you."

They passed through a great hall, and up a marble staircase to a long gallery, its windows open to the moonlight and the sea. The man threw open the door.

"The Signor Merrow."

The door closed on Merrow. He was standing in a dim, vast room with high windows opening upon a shaded terrace. A lamp stood on a table, and at the table sat the Marchese de Panormo.

Merrow ceased to be conscious of anything but the man. He had a halo of white hair shining like silver wire, a strange, still face, and two very dark eyes that seemed to look both at and beyond things. He looked at Merrow. He wore a simple, black garment like a soutane, and when he was sitting he gave the impression of tallness. He did not move a muscle. He sat there in the yellow pool of light, with the shadowy vastness of the room about him, and looked with those strange, unworldly eyes at the young man.

"Mr. Merrow?"

"Yes, sir."

"I hope you have had a good journey?"

"I have, sir."

Again there was silence. Those dark eyes in that glowing and visionary face! Merrow had never had to bear such scrutiny. He had a feeling as of standing before a judgment table in some other world that was more beautiful and more impersonal than the world he knew.

"Mr. Merrow, I asked Mr. Field to send me out a gentleman. That is the spirit that I require."

"I hope I understand, sir."

"I think—perhaps—you do. Tomorrow you and I will go over the

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estate together. I have certain prejudices that I shall wish to impress upon you. It is possible that you may be able to share them. And now—I expect that you are tired. My man will show you your house. Good night, Mr. Merrow."

"Good night, sir."

Merrow went out, feeling like a boy who has stood before some supreme master, a man both severe and gentle. Strangely, too, came a sudden sense of guilt, of incompleteness, for he was lying to this man, this master. He tried to shrug it off. What did it matter? Surely, marriage was an innocent state, even the concealing of a happy marriage for the sake of your mate's happiness? And an eccentric aristocrat, half-English, half-Italian, demanding that men should obey impossible orders—!

"Unfair—?"

The chauffeur drove him and his luggage down to the little house where he was to live. It had a loggia smothered with vines and roses, groves of orange and lemon-trees, and Merrow could hear the soft wash of the sea. A peaceful spot, white-walled in the moonlight.

A man came out to meet him, a little old Italian with gentle eyes and thin, white hair.

"Welcome, signor."

And Merrow went in to look at his new home. It was simple and clean, with an exquisite and white simplicity. A cold supper had been laid; a great flask of red wine stood beside a dish of fruit.

Merrow felt strange. He was in another world, and almost it felt like a spirit world.

"My name is Giovanni," said the old man, smiling. "Will the signor eat?"

"Yes, I am hungry, Giovanni."

He sat down and stared at the wine and the fruit.

Next day the life began. Going early to the Villa Panormo he found the Marchese waiting for him on the great terrace overlooking the sea.

"Good morning, Mr. Merrow. I hope you have slept well?"

"Very well, sir, thank you."

The dark eyes held the blue ones.

"We will walk over the estate, Mr. Merrow."

"Yes, sir."

For some reason—known only to himself—Jimmy Merrow blushed, and an inward blush remained with him through all that singular morning. He walked beside the tall figure in the soutane, listening to that quiet voice, aware of those deep eyes. Here was a great man, a man whose words and manners were so simple that Merrow felt like a wondering child. And a courtesy that was as beautiful as its frankness.

"No birds are ever killed here, Mr. Merrow."

"No, sir."

"There is not a gun on the estate—and no children. Children are cruel."

"All of them, sir?"

"No, not all. But I prefer my children to be old."

And so they were. In the vineyards, the orchards, the gardens and olive-groves Merrow saw no one but an occasional old man quietly working. The Marchese stopped and spoke to each worker as to a friend.

"Luigi, this is Mr. Merrow, the new agent."

Merrow, smiling, would reach out a hand and grasp brown, old fingers.

"I am glad to be here, Luigi."

John Jermyn watched him. He wanted youth here and the vigour of it, but not youth that is inflated and restless and violent. He watched Merrow with the old men, and he saw the gentleman.

They walked seven miles, and all that Merrow saw was good.

"I shall have much to learn, sir."

"The land and life are the same everywhere, Mr. Merrow."

"Is there any other thing you wish to impress upon me, sir?"

The dark eyes watched him.

"Perhaps—you have noticed the absence of something."

"I have, sir."

"There are no women here."

"No, sir."

"You may think that strange."

Merrow's Wife

Mr. Merrow, but I have my reason. It is not because I look on Eve as wholly Eve. But—here—we old men—know peace. They come as probationers—these old fellows—they stay, or go, as they please. Some go—some stay. Those who stay have outgrown life's restlessness. Here—in the sun—and among the fruit-trees—we think good thoughts."

And once more Merrow blushed.

It took him a week to come to his decision. It was forced upon him, or, rather, he accepted it as a sensitive boy accepts beauty, honour and goodness.

"I can't lie to him. It hurts me."

He wrote to his wife:

"This is the most wonderful place—and the most wonderful man. You feel you are living in a different world. It is like being on the top of a mountain. Kitty—I have got to tell him the truth. He is the sort of man you cannot look in the face unless you have nothing to hide. You have a feeling that he sees and knows—everything. One used to read of great men. He is one."

It was on the terrace overlooking the sea that Merrow made his confession. He had found the Marchese here, sitting in the shade of a group of tall cypresses.

"May I speak to you, sir?"

"What is it, Merrow?"

He looked at the flushed face.

"I wish to resign my post, sir."

"Oh? Too lonely for you?"

"No, sir. I feel that I came here under false pretences. I'm married, sir."

He looked down at the Marchese's knees; he was aware of a feeling of immense relief, and of a sense of stillness. Then he heard Jermyn's voice.

"I felt that you had something to tell me, Merrow. Where is your wife?"

"In England, sir."

"How long have you been married?"

"We were married during the War. We had a rather hard time, sir—afterwards; and then this chance came. She wanted me to go and try.

She thought— But she is a great little sportswoman, sir."

"And she agreed to stay at home—alone?"

"Yes. Of course—I was to send her most of my salary. I thought of trying it for six months. I thought—"

The Marchese held up a hand.

"Merrow—why do you tell me this?"

The blue eyes rose to meet the dark ones.

"Because—sir—when I realised—it's not priggishness—a lie can't live in this place, sir, near you. It made me feel mean. I'm sorry, sir. I shall have given you a lot of trouble for nothing—and had nothing but kindness."

There was a pause, a silence, and Merrow waited, wondering what his great man would say to him.

"How old is your wife?"

"Twenty-four, sir."

"Have you—by chance—a portrait of her?"

Merrow flushed.

"Yes, a miniature, sir. She had it done for me during the War."

He felt for his pocket-book and took from it a little gold miniature-case. He handed it to the Marchese.

"It is a very good likeness, sir."

Then he stood, astonished, for John Jermyn, Marchese de Panormo, was holding the miniature in the palm of his right hand and looking at it with eyes of wonder. He seemed to bend forward in his chair; his very pale face was faintly flushed.

"This is your wife, Merrow?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is her name?"

"Catherine—Kitty."

The Marchese rose. He had the appearance of a man suffering from some shock of emotion. He walked across the terrace into the sunlight, still holding the miniature and gazing at it. Merrow stood silent and perplexed.

The Marchese had the face of a man who was praying.

"Merrow—"

"Sir?"

"There is something strange in this.

By Warwick Deeping

Leave this picture with me. Come to me to-morrow morning. I shall have something to say to you."

Merrow looked at him, and even in his bewilderment he felt that there was nothing to be said. Silence was asked for. He turned and walked away.

That night two men wandered alone and late, one in the olive-groves, the other on the terrace above the sea. Merrow might ask questions of the stars and the trees, but there was no one to answer his questions, but with that other man there went a presence, a voice, something unseen yet seen. He spoke, and was answered, though no human ear would have heard the words uttered by that other voice.

"What is your wish, my beloved?"

"Let her come to us. Let her come."

Merrow, standing in the morning sunlight and holding the returned miniature in his hand, seemed unable to grasp the meaning of the words he had heard.

"You tell me to send for her, sir?"

"I do."

"To live here?"

"That will be for her and for me to say."

"But I don't understand, sir."

The Marchese looked at him with a curious, grave smile.

"She—will understand—Merrow, if she is like her picture. And she will tell you. On my desk in the library you will find a cheque on my English bank drawn in favour of your wife. Her travelling expenses. Send it. Write to her to come."

Merrow's face expressed a bewildered gratitude.

"Still—I don't understand, sir; but what you say carries. I only know—that you could do nothing that isn't great and kind—"

The Marchese's smile deepened.

"*Sancta simplicitas*. Go, my boy, and write to your wife."

Ten days passed before Kitty came as a living echo to the cry of that letter. Merrow met her at Castello Station; he had borrowed the car

for the afternoon; he drove a mile and then pulled up in a lonely place in the high pine-woods.

"Kitty—"

"Oh, Jimmy!"

They kissed as they had kissed when Merrow had come home on leave during the War.

"Your letter left me puzzled. Is it that he wants to see me before he decides?"

"I suppose so. And yet there is something I don't understand. He said you would understand."

"But he hates women."

"No—somehow—I don't think it is that. He is too great to hate. I can't describe him, or the way he makes you feel. Only—that you can't feel mean, or petty, or cheap, anywhere near him."

She looked grave and pensively tender.

"And we thought and spoke of him as a curmudgeon! I'm sorry, Jimmy; one is apt to get cheap in these days. Life is so breathed on and tarnished."

Merrow kissed her.

"That's just what it isn't here. Crystal and clear and beautiful. He has made a little paradise of Panormo. Wait and see."

He drove on and she sat in silence beside him, drinking in the blueness of the sea and sky.

"When shall I see him, Jimmy?"

"To-night. He said that, if you were not tired, he would like to see you to-night."

"I'm too happy to be tired."

"He wishes to see you alone."

The daylight still held when Merrow took his wife to the Villa Panormo, and left her to be bowed up the marble stairs by old Pansa, the major-domo.

"I'll wait for you, Kitty—in the lower garden—here."

Old Pansa, broad as a door, breathed heavily up the great stairway.

"The Marchese is on the terrace, signora."

He bowed her out on to the terrace, announced her in his deep and husky voice and disappeared.

The Marchese had been seated, reading a book bound in red vellum.

Marrow's Wife

He rose; he came forward and paused, with his tall figure outlined against the sunset over the sea. He looked at Marrow's wife. His dark eyes seemed to widen.

"Incredible!" he said.

He bowed to her.

"My child, if I seem to stare—forgive me. In a little while you will realise that I have good cause to feel astonished."

He came to take her hand. She held it out; and he bent slowly and most gravely kissed it.

"To you—this must seem perplexing. I have something to show you. But—first—let me look at you again."

She had to bear the scrutiny of those dark eyes. She saw him smile.

"Good! Come—now—"

He led her into the library and through it into a little chapel. It was all soft blue and silver, and its windows were full of the sunset. Above the altar hung a picture covered with a dark-green cloth, and when the Marchese pulled a silk cord the cloth slid back. The light was right for the picture: the portrait of a woman.

Marrow's wife was looking at a portrait of herself, or at a woman who was so like to her that she stood and gazed like a child.

"Who is it?"

"Child, that is my wife. Dead in the flesh—but here in the spirit."

He crossed himself and, pulling the cord, re-covered the picture.

"An amazing likeness. And perhaps no mere trick of the flesh. Come—I have more to tell you—I will tell it on the terrace—while the sun sets."

The stars were out when Marrow

saw his wife descending the white steps of the portico. He went to meet her, and she put her hand in his. She was very pale. The soft solemnity of her face made him think of her as he remembered her on her wedding-day, walking up the dim, village church to him. She had partaken of some human sacrament.

"Jimmy—I have seen his wife."

"His wife!"

"Her portrait. It might be me I know, now, how he made you feel. He seems to belong to another world."

Marrow watched her.

"Are you to stay with me?"

"Yes."

"It's amazing—"

She turned to him quickly.

"Jimmy—I'm to tell you. He trusts us. It's all very beautiful and strange. If I had not seen him and spoken to him, I should have thought him mad. His wife is not dead."

"Not dead!"

"Dead—but alive to him. He says that she kneels beside him in the chapel, and walks beside him on the terrace, a presence, a spirit. They speak to each other."

Marrow's hand pressed hers.

"No; he's not mad. No man was ever more beautifully sane. I begin to understand—"

"Yes; that is why he wishes no other woman near, no other presence. He wishes to be alone—with her. Just a few gentle old men—and the birds—and her."

Marrow's blue eyes were awed.

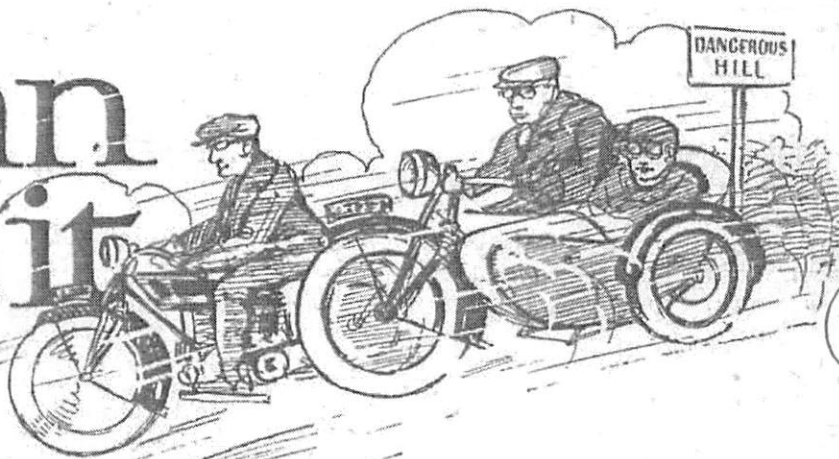
"And yet—we are to stay here! Kitty, it's rather wonderful—"

"It's beautiful," she said.

WARWICK DEERING.



I Can 'Op it



By WARWICK DEEPING

A ROAD HOG—THE GIRL NEXT DOOR—A SPILL

HE owned a motor-bike and side-car.

Had he been sufficiently affluent to own an automobile he would have talked about "the old bus," and putting your toe on the "juice pedal," and he would have spoken of the "mag" and the "brass-pot," and the s-p-s. He called himself a "speed-merchant," and he went regularly to Brooklands in a filthy, oil-stained brown mackintosh, his hair hanging in a greasy black mop, his hands the hands of a slovenly mechanic.

Twenty years ago superior people would have called him a roaring young cad, and most certainly he had no manners, but his mother loved him. She had given him the unwise adoration of a sentimental widow.

On ordinary days he travelled up to London and worked in an office. That was his crawling and larval stage. His wings blossomed during the week-end, when he would go careering about the country, making a devastating noise, a nuisance to everybody, and a danger to others and himself.

He had been cautioned by the local police, and it had delighted him. He had terrified sundry children, killed a dog, and caused the local greengrocer's horse to bolt, luckily without damage. He had a prejudice against horses. He said—arrogantly—that horses were obsolete.

In fact he was a very arrogant youth—and very modern, for no one had ever licked him.

Mrs. Jukes—his mother—lived in a little red villa at Croxted, and Ernest's motor-bike lived in a little corrugated

iron shed beside the villa. The villa next door was larger and more important than the Jukes's. It belonged to an ex-naval officer, Commander Scroop, who had some technical job in town. His wife was a dark little woman with kind eyes, the mother of three strapping daughters, Elsie, Rose and Joan, energetic, frank-eyed young women who had had a somewhat Spartan upbringing. Elsie was a celebrity's secretary; Rose helped her mother; Joan had developed unexpected abilities; she was part owner of a big garage somewhere on the Brighton road, and an expert in all that pertained to cars. She was a quiet girl with brown hair and grey eyes, and a firm white chin. She looked at you before she spoke, and if she did not like you she said but little. Her father called her "Miss Laconic."

To the Scroop girls Ernie Jukes was known as "The Tuft-head." He had made attempts to impress them over the privet hedge that divided the two properties.

"Come for a spin in 'Op it.'"

They declined to spin with him, though other young women were less fastidious. Painted on the back of Ernest's side-car was the device—"I can 'op it," a challenge to all other users of the road. Carrying some gay young thing with bandeau and vivid jumper, he flaunted his speed and his smell in the faces of other "nuts."

Mrs. Jukes was worried. She was afraid of "I can 'op it," and of what "I can 'op it" might do to her son. On the few occasions when she had pleaded with Ernest to be careful he had been terse and rude.

"Rot, mater; I'm not an old woman."

Mrs. Jukes and Mrs. Scroop were acquaintances whose acquaintanceship sometimes bordered on friendship, and the kind eyes of the Commander's wife had caused Mrs. Jukes to confide in her. Ernest's mother was chubby and douce, with wavy fair hair that was turning grey, and a mouth that was not made to be stern.

"I do wish someone would persuade him to be less reckless. I am sure he will have an accident one of these days."

"Why don't you go out with him?"

Mrs. Jukes looked plaintive.

"He says I should be nervous."

"Not if he drives slowly."

"But—then—you see—he doesn't like driving slowly. And I suppose I am rather heavy."

Obviously the objection came from the son and not from the mother, and Mrs. Scroop was sorry for both of them. Ernest preferred his flamboyant flappers, which was crudely natural, but unkind.

At dinner that night, it being a Saturday, and the Scroop family in full session, Mrs. Jukes and her son were discussed. Joan, who came home once a month, and was less familiar than the others with the rapidities of the lad next door, listened and said little. Elsie and Rose, fresh from winning all their sets in a ladies' doubles match at the tennis club, were rather merciless critics.

"The fact is he's spoilt."

"Doesn't play any game. He wants a dose of 'Rugger.'"

"What would you do with him, daddy?"

The Commander laughed.

"Marry him to one of you."

"Thanks!"

"Selfish young cub. I would have his hair cut, and a cold compress applied to his head. And I would put a match to that beastly machine of his."

Mrs. Scroop protested.

"Don't be so hard on the boy."

"Oh, materkin! He's not a sport. If he took his mother out sometimes—"

"She would be frightened to death."

"Not if he drove like a nice lad, instead of hogging it."

Their father made a wise remark.

"That's his particular form of vanity. The child thinks he is the fastest thing on the road."

"He's not. He's simply an unlicked little beast."

Scroop flapped his serviette.

"Pax! The white flag is up—you force young women."

"Well—someone ought to take the swank out of the lad—if it were worth while."

Joan the silent helped herself to a second helping of salmon mayonnaise.

"From Mrs. Jukes's point of view, it might be worth while," she said.

The following day being Sunday, Ernest spent the morning tinkering at "I can 'op it," while his mother went to church, and about half-past eleven Joan Scroop looked over the privet hedge. Ernest's black hair was hanging over his face. He looked very hot and greasy. The stump of a cigarette was stuck in the left corner of his mouth. His particular hero at Brooklands always wore the remains of a cigarette in that particular position.

He sighted Joan.

"Morning."

"Morning," said she.

Ernest straightened, and wiped his hands on the seat of his trousers.

"Having a bit of a tune up. Doing an odd hundred this afternoon!"

Joan appeared interested and impressed.

"You've got a 'Red Eagle.'"

"Some machine."

"Fast?"

"Lick any other combination round this way. I can drive her—a bit. Say, come for a spin?"

He swaggered, but Joan was playing tennis, and she told him so.

"Pat-ball!" and he surveyed the mere woman: "I'm a speed-merchant. Pat-ball's no use to me."

Joan the laconic had a sense of humour, and but for the unnecessary offensiveness of the young man's conceit, she might not have deigned to have meddled with him. Also, she had some sympathy for poor Mrs. Jukes who was dominated by that little petrol god—"I can 'op it." It seemed to Joan that if "I can 'op it" were dethroned, humiliated, made to look foolish, it might do good for "I can 'op it's" lord and master.

When Joan returned to her flourishing enterprise upon the Brighton road, she had a few enlivening words with her two partners. It appeared that she had made up her mind to ride her "Planet" in one of the hill-climbing and reliability trials. Already she was the possessor of two gold medals.

"But I thought you had promised your mother not to race any more—?"

"It was not exactly a promise. Besides, I think I humoured the dear little woman far enough when I agreed not to ride or trade under my own name."

"Well—what are you going to ride?"

"My 'Planet' combination."
"Right'o."

Joan went into the workshop and spoke to the foreman mechanic.

"Smith, I want my 'Planet' overhauled and tuned up."

"Yes, miss."

"New tyres. I am going to practise stunts up Grig Hill."

Smith grinned.

"Shall I put some ballast in the side-car, miss?"

"No. I want to practise my favourite skid. And—oh—Smith—"

"Yes, miss."

"I want something painted on the back of the side-car in biggish white letters."

"What is it?"

"So can I."

"So can I?"

"Yes, just that."

Smith's grin was a little puzzled, but Miss Joan Scroop always had a reason for things.

Each evening for the next three weeks Joan put her "Planet" through its paces. She had mapped out a fairly varied

course. It began within ten miles of Croxted, struck Leatherhead, ran thence to Guildford, turned south-east through Womersley and Cranley to Horsham, turned north again and brought her in due course to her *pièce de résistance*, Grig Hill. Grig Hill was nothing to the precipitous and loose-surfaced



A yard or two farther on Joan saw a pair of legs kicking in a furze bush



hills that Joan had tackled when she had won her medals, but it was sufficiently stiff and winding to allow for thrills and the trick driving of the expert. There were masses of gorse at the worst corners, and a spill here might be more uncomfortable than dangerous. She made the "Planet" surge up Grig Hill.

She knew every twist and pot-hole and bank, and the corner where her patent skid would allow her to negotiate it at a speed that was audacious. This corner had no banking on its near side; it curved to the right, and a spill would land the spilled one into a tangle of furze and of bramble.

She arrived at Croxted late one Friday evening, riding her "Planet," and the machine was stowed away in the Scroop garage beside the Commander's small two-seater. Rose, who had opened the doors of the garage, remarked upon the device painted upon the side-car's back panel.

"What on earth does that mean?"

"Oh—nothing. It was a wheeze of Jack's. I lent him the machine for a month."

"Reminds me of the Tuft-head's motto. Why, don't you see—?"

"See what?" asked Joan.

"Why, if you happened to be riding that thing,

and you passed dear Ernie, it would be a sort of snub."

"Well, so it would. And 'I can 'op it' would have to travel a bit to keep 'So can I' in sight."

On the Saturday, after lunch, Joan, having surveyed the next door precincts from the bath-room window, went down and pushed her machine out of the garage. She had hung a leather coat over the back of the side-car. On the other side of the low fence and the privet hedge young Jukes was inspecting "I can 'op it's" magneto.

Joan switched on, trod on the kick-starter, and let her engine roar. Then she switched off. And as she had expected, Mr. Ernest's face appeared above the top of the hedge.

"Hallo! That yours?"

"It is."

"Just bought it?"

"Yes, second-hand."

"What make?"

"Planet."

Ernest had a patronizing air.

"O—not so bad. Not up to my standard, though. Learnt to drive yet?"

"Well—partly."

Mr. Jukes had an idea.

"Look here—I'm tootling out presently. Supposing you come along with your machine. I can give you a few tips—and play pilot."

Joan looked demure.

"I'm afraid you would go too fast for me."

"Oh—I'd make allowances."

"Thanks so much—but I think I had better take things quietly—alone."

She remained there—dissembling. She asked one or two silly questions which Ernest answered with professional superiority. He was preparing to let "I can 'op it" off the chain, and Joan waited, ready to slue the "Planet" out of the gate and follow after him.

"Which way are you going?"

"Leatherhead."

She knew that Leatherhead would suit her very well.

When Ernest set off, bare-headed, cigarette-stump stuck in the corner of his mouth, and with a goliwog fastened to the handle-bars, Joan followed in pursuit. She allowed him to lead by a hundred yards or so, and keeping this distance roughly between them, she shadowed him to Leatherhead. Ernest drove fast, much too fast, and with neither consideration nor courtesy, for the road they were following was not made for speed.

"You are a fool, and an inconsiderate fool," was Joan's verdict, but she had to hog it in order to keep in touch with him.

In Leatherhead traffic held them up, and Joan narrowly missed a Ford van that swung suddenly from a side turning across the main road, and without hooting, as some vans do. It was driven by a lout whose intelligence was as flaccid as his lower lip. Joan politely called him an idiot and passed on.

"I can 'op it" had forged ahead. She went in pursuit, and re-sighting the red machine, kept her distance behind it, until an open stretch of road, straight and wide and free from bolt holes for Ford vans, gave her her legitimate opportunity for speed.

She let the "Planet" go, and overhauling "I can 'op it," began to make impertinent noises with her klaxon.

Ernest accelerated.

So did Joan.

Their eyes met for a moment as she passed him, and then, as she settled down to serious scorching, she knew that he must have read the mystic device.

"So can I."

She could divine this raw young man's emotions. His first feeling would be one of surprise, and from surprise he would advance to the assumption that she was a rash and reckless novice. But emulation would prove irresistible. "I can 'op it" would react to that insulting challenge thrown out by "So can I," and Joan laughed as she heard the red machine exploding fiercely behind her. She allowed Ernest to draw up and to hoot, but at the sound of his hooting she accelerated and shot away, leaving him to reflect upon those mystic words upon her side-car.

Nearing Guildford she slowed up, and when Ernest came forging up she waggled a casual hand to advise caution. But he would not accept her signal; he drew level, and attempted to travel beside her.

"You mustn't do that," she said.

He looked ruffled both in head and temper.

"Why not?"

"I didn't wave you on. Get back on your proper side."

She accelerated slightly as a big car approached, and Ernest, pushed off the crown of the road, was obliged to drop behind her.

They were among houses now, and involved in a whirl of week-end traffic, and when Joan gave him the cautioning signal he obeyed it. She wormed her way down the High Street where the

amiable Guildford police allow cars to stand and gossip as they please, and turning to the left, cruised along towards Womersley. Ernest had been involved in a traffic jam, but presently she heard him behind her.

He was shouting.

"I say! Hallo——!"

She slowed up, waving a hand, and allowed him to come close.

"I beg your pardon."

"I say—if you drive like that——"

"Like what?"

"Well—for a beginner—— Of all the reckless hogging——"

She threw her head back and laughed.

"Oh—don't worry. I feel quite confident. I know my machine is a bit faster than yours, but I am getting the feel of it. Good-bye."

She set sail for Horsham, and left "I can 'op it" plugging savagely somewhere behind her. She shook off the pursuit, and arriving within a mile or so of the Sussex town she pulled up, turned "So can I" on to the grass, took her tea-basket and a rug from the side-car, and settled herself comfortably under the shade of a tree. She was smoking a cigarette and enjoying her third cup of tea when Ernest appeared upon the horizon.

He pulled up, looking sulkily at her tea-basket.

"Had to change a plug."

"Oh," she said, as though it was a matter of supreme unimportance.

He, too, had a tea-basket. He ran his machine on to the grass and sat down. His arrogance had arrived at the explanatory stage.

"My old bus has struck an off day."

"Oh!"

"I shall have to give her a tune up."

"She seemed to be running quite nicely."

A bit noisy—of course."

He looked offended.

"She's not as noisy as yours."

"Oh—I think so. A bit more so. You drive her all out. I could hear her chattering—and cussing——"

Mr. Jukes spilt some hot tea over one leg.

"Look here, you've got some cheek."

"I beg your pardon."

"Talking like a blessed pro. I know a thing or two about motor-bikes."

"I suppose you were riding before I was born!"

She lit another cigarette.

"You see, I was taught by an expert. He designs motor-bikes and cars."

"Oh, does he!"

"Yes."

"A Brooklands merchant, I suppose."

"He held one or two records. But the girl he is engaged to made him drop racing. Racing, after all, is rather for the raw boys—and the fool men who don't matter. Any young ass can hog it."

Mr. Jukes swallowed tea and anger.

"Oh, can he!"

"Of course. Real driving, careful, considerate driving is an art. I have no use for the cad who talks of 'treading on the juice pedal.' Just stupid egotism, that's all."

Ernest indulged in half a minute's meditation. She had touched his rawness, and he resented it, because in his hot-headed way he still considered her a novice. Moreover, she was a girl, and he had been used to girls who sat in a side-car or on a pillion and applauded his masterful driving.

Joan threw away her cigarette end, and picked up her tea basket.

"I think I'll be moving."

"Which way?" he asked with aggressive sulkiness.

"Oh, I am going to have a shot at Grig Hill. They tell me it is a bit stiff."

"Rot! I know all about Grig Hill," he said arrogantly. "Raced a chap up it last month and licked his head off. It just takes doing, that's all."

Joan rose, and so did he.

"Good-bye."

"Wait half a mo," said he, "I'd better show you the way up Grig Hill."

She smiled over his head.

"I don't think so. I shall be there first, and you won't have a chance with me up Grig Hill."

"Well—I'm——!"

He mounted "I can 'op it" with the air of a desperate fellow about to charge a battery of guns.

Joan wondered. She wondered all the way while she was speeding Surreywards whether Ernest would have the nerve to rush full tilt at Grig Hill. She doubted it. He was the sort of youth who talked big, but who had not the real hardness, the cool cold grip at a crisis. He would flinch, and flinching meant bungling.

Suppose she broke poor Ernest's neck?

But, on the other hand, supposing she might be able to teach him how nasty it was to come very close to breaking your neck?

He needed a spill. Unlicked youth needs spilling.

She had left him well behind, but she slackened until she heard him banging away behind her. They left the main road

and began the long and gradual climb that ended in Grig Hill. And he tried to pass her. In fact she let him pass her. He was looking rather white, but he gave her a superior grin.

"This is where I come in," he shouted.

"Or come off," she retorted.

She chose her ground, and settling herself well down in the saddle, went up and past him where the road ran up and straight for a hundred yards. She had a momentary glimpse of his face, a face grown suddenly flaccid and uncertain. His handle-bars wobbled perceptibly.

She scorched up, negotiating corners, intent now on the tricky business in hand. "I can 'op it" was labouring at full speed behind her, though as they neared the S-shaped bend she fancied that Ernest let "I can 'op it" flinch and falter. Joan took the double curve like the expert that she was, but as she straightened out she heard a significant noise on the hill behind her.

She pulled up, and in to the side of the road, dismounted, and ran back. "I can 'op it" lay upside down in a mass of brambles, and a yard or two farther on Joan saw a pair of legs kicking in a furze bush.

She helped to pull him out. He was badly scratched and frightened, but little the worse for the toss he had taken.

"You had better sit down," she said.

He sat down and became emotional.

"Poor old bike—nearly did me in, by George!"

"Yes, you were lucky."

"And poor old mater——"

"It would have been a terrible shock to her. You ought not to be so reckless."

He had brought out a handkerchief and was dabbing his scratched face.

"Poor old mater. I say, how the devil did you manage? When I saw you go up at that pace, I felt certain you would have a smash."

"Oh, I managed somehow," she said casually; "a mixture of luck—and cunning, perhaps."

He looked at her doubtfully, and at the carcass of "I can 'op it."

"Next machine I have will be a 'Planet.' But I say, if I bring that old wreck home the mater will have a fit."

"Of course. You ought to think of her."

"What am I to do?"

"Well—you can get into my side-car, and we can call at a garage and get them to collect and repair your machine. I won't say anything about it to your mother."

"I say—you're a sport."

"Yes—but only on the understanding that you give up being reckless. It's not worth it, you know. Besides, when you take your mother out she doesn't enjoy it, does she?"

Ernest looked doubtfully at his right boot.

"Well—no, it makes her nervous. The fact is, I haven't taken her out very often."

Joan took him back to Croxted in her side-car, calling at one of the Dorking garages to arrange for the rescuing of "I can 'op it." Ernest had made no attempt to save his machine, or to investigate the damage. Grig Hill and Joan Scroop appeared to have reduced the dashing "speed merchant" to the level of a decent humility.

"I say," he said, "what shall I tell the mater?"

"Why—just say you had a slight breakdown."

The adventure ended at Mrs. Jukes' front gate, but its after effects became evident as the weeks went by, and "I can 'op it" returned to its home in the galvanized iron shed. There are people who are destitute of imagination, but Ernest Jukes was not one of them, and that upset on Grig Hill had shocked a dormant imagination into useful activity. Moreover, it was an undeniable fact that a girl had licked him most thoroughly, and had helped to pull his inverted vanity out of a furze bush.

Joan had news of him and of his affairs from time to time.

"'I can 'op it' has ceased to be. He has had the words painted out."

"He has been taking his mother out quite often. She seems to enjoy it."

"He has joined the tennis club. Of course, he is an awful rabbit, but he realizes that he is a rabbit."

At the end of the season Ernest Jukes was playing tennis with the Scroop girls. He played very badly, and admitted his games' badness, but he was willing to accept frank advice. As a rule he brought his mother down with him to the club, driving her in the side-car of the one time "I can 'op it."

It was agreed that young Jukes was developing possibilities. He bore no malice, and he wore his hair shorter. Clean white flannels were an improvement upon the Brooklands costume.

His admiration for Joan Scroop became almost too evident.

But when a raw youth has come to the point of admiring something that is admirable—there is hope for him. The "I can 'op it" phase has passed.

The Secret Wife

by WARWICK DEEPING

Love is even stronger than tradition and the schemes of a calculating woman

THE Prince was happy. He lay in a long chair on the terrace of his villa at Monte Rosa, and looked across the lake at the little white house in the distance, where Marie Zerlinka lived.

A year ago the world had been asking: "What has become of Marie? Why has the Zerlinka ceased to sing?" And Prince Rodolph had smiled, for he knew what had happened to Marie Zerlinka, and that she had ceased to sing to the crowd in order to please one man.

The Prince had been reading Nietzsche, and his exposition of the will to power, but the white house across the lake was more potent than the philosopher. The trouble was that Rodolph had no wish for power; his family had given him a surfeit of it; he wanted to be let alone and to let alone. Always, he was sneaking away to this villa of his above the lake, unprincing himself to become the private person who loved sailing on the lake and scrambling about the country in disgraceful old clothes. He would wear nothing but a white shirt and old riding breeches and stockings, and he scorned collars and hats. He made friends with the peasants, and listened to Marie Zerlinka's voice.

He lay there and dreamed, looking over the stone balustrade and between the groups of cypresses to the blue water and the softer blue of the hills. Marie's little house stood out like a block of white marble. He was going to dine with Marie at eight o'clock, rowing himself over the lake like some Wagner hero.

But Marie was not heroic in the operatic sense, and the Prince thanked God for it. She was such a reposeful creature, and the amazing thing was that popularity had not spoilt her. When she sang she made you feel that she could not

help singing. Moreover, she had such a queer, elfish understanding of life. She understood him, why he loved old clothes and idleness, and the peasants, and the vineyards, and books, and any place where heels were not clicked and people did not put on and take off their smiles.

The Prince's reverie was disturbed by a sound coming from the lake, the panting of a small steamer, and as he sat up in his chair he saw the boat appear from behind a group of cypresses. She was making for the jetty at Monte Rosa. The Prince could distinguish three people on the after-deck, two men and a woman. They were standing close together and looking in the direction of his villa.

The dreaminess went out of the Prince's eyes.

"Confound it," he thought, "if that isn't old Crambach, six feet of severity. And the woman, nearly as tall as Crambach——!"

He stood up, and, placing himself in the shadow of a tree, watched the steamer attach herself to the jetty, and dispose of her passengers. The three figures appeared upon the white road, and behind them and at a little distance other figures followed.

"Luggage—servants!" said the Prince. "Good heavens, they are coming to stay with me!"

He was annoyed and more than annoyed. He resumed his place in the long chair, and bit his moustache, and looked thoughtfully across the water at Marie Zerlinka's little house. Confound these people! The Prince had good cause to know that when Count Crambach appeared anywhere with his bald head and his fierce white moustachios somebody would be presented with a problem.

The Prince picked up his Nietzsche and pretended to read. He had every appearance of being absorbed in the book when a

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servant ushered two gentlemen on to the terrace.

"Your Highness, Count Crambach and Baron Burin."

The Prince looked up with his charming but ironical smile.

"Gentlemen, this is a delightful surprise."

They bowed. The Count was very tall, a fierce old man with black eyes that looked out of two deep hollows. Burin was plump and bearded and pleasant, the sort of man who could do and say the correct thing on all occasions, and who never disagreed with anyone of higher rank than himself. The Prince felt that Crambach was looking disapprovingly at his clothes.

The Count produced a letter. The Prince had suspected the existence of a letter.

"For your hands, sir."

"Thanks, Count. Ah, a letter! Charming things—letters. You will excuse me?"

The Prince opened the letter and read it. It came from the Serene Person who had originated his existence, and it was very curt and suggestive.

"Fearing that you will be bored at Monte Rosa, I have sent you, my dear boy, Count Crambach and Baron Burin."

Rodolph refolded the letter.

"How very thoughtful of my illustrious father! But—Count, excuse me, I thought that I saw upon the steamer——"

"A lady, sir?"

"Yes, a lady."

"Your Highness was not mistaken. The Duchess of Daun accompanies us."

"Indeed! To help you to relieve my ennui?"

"The Duchess will explain, sir."

"But where is she?"

"I think the Duchess is a little fatigued, sir. She asked to be shown to her rooms."

"I see. I hope my servants are good at improvisation. And doubtless you, gentlemen, are also a little exhausted. I will come and see that——"

Count Crambach bowed stiffly.

"Most certainly not. Your Highness is the one person to be considered. Please do not disturb yourself, sir. I am an old soldier."

The Prince lay back in his chair, and watched their retreat through the garden.

"Now, what the devil does all this mean?" he thought. "I suppose the red-headed Daun woman will explain."

Rodolph waited half an hour. His expectation was that the great lady would soon throw off her fatigue and descend upon him like Juno. He had read another chapter of Nietzsche when he was aware of her standing at the top of the flight of steps leading down from the garden to the terrace.

Brunhilde—Duchess of Daun—was a very tall woman with brown eyes and red-brown hair. Her slightly aquiline nose overhung a long, full-lipped, sensual mouth, and her undercut nostrils gave her an air of fierce superciliousness. Handsome, dissipated, and most infernally clever, she had a tongue and a smile that could banish ennui from the jaded hearts of illustrious admirers. She had power, the power of a woman who is brilliant and provocative.

The Prince rose to meet her.

"Dear lady, this descent of yours is miraculous."

She curtsied, came down the steps, and curtsied a second time, and her brown eyes answered his irony.

"Your Highness will pardon me for intruding myself between him and his books."

"And—I—must apologize for my clothes. Please forgive them."

"It is easy to forgive his Highness everything—but to regret what one forgives."

"My eccentricities? Please be seated. Let us be quite frank."

He balanced himself on the balustrade.

"I am not approved of."

"Your Highness wishes me to be frank?"

"I began it."

"Then, sir, we regret the Prince in finding the man."

He laughed.

"I see. You look on me as a renegade. I am a disgrace to the royal tradition. But—then—you see—my dear Duchess, the royal idea bores me. There is dear Siegfried—my brother—who would be so much better at playing the hero in shining armour. And have you too brought me a letter?"

She looked him full in the eyes.

"I have."

"May I see it?"

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"With pleasure. But, may I warn his Highness that I know its contents, and that—as a woman—I feel moved to soften the possible shock?"

"By all means. Your kindness of heart is notorious."

She flushed, and her fine eyes offered him more than sympathy.

"You are unjust to me, Rodolph."

She showed him herself—the woman.

"I have had orders to marry you."

"And I—?"

"That letter gives you your order to marry me."

"My dear Duchess, I am overwhelmed."

She rose, walked to the balustrade, and after looking across the lake she returned to her chair. She gave him the impression of a red flame screened behind white glass. An illustrious tyranny was in sympathy with her desire for a certain man.

"Perhaps his Highness will read the letter?"

She took it from her dress and threw it to him. It fell at his feet, and he picked it up, and, opening it, read what the illustrious hand had written. His face was very grave. He seemed to forget the woman who was watching him. His glance went over the lake to Marie Zerlinka's house.

"Your Highness is very unwise."

He turned his head sharply.

"How?"

"A singing girl, a silly bird in a cage."

His eyes asked her the question: "You know?"

She gave him a slight movement of her imperious head. "We know. It is our duty to know. This foolishness is treachery to us all. You will pardon me. A Prince has duties."

"Of course."

"Perhaps his Highness has noticed a blank space in that letter?"

"I have."

"Life is going to be very serious, so serious that certain things are not written, for it was safer not to write them, but I can repeat the words to your Highness."

"Is it necessary?"

"As necessary as war. It is coming. You know, Rodolph, as well as the rest of us, that unless we dazzle the world the gutters will overflow and drown us."

The Prince rose.

"You will excuse me, my dear Duchess. I am dining to-night with Marie Zerlinka. I shall make it my care to see that everything here is to your liking."

She rose and curtsied.

"Thank you, sir. I hope to give myself the pleasure of calling on the Zerlinka to-morrow. You will permit it?"

"That is for my wife to say, for she is my wife, my dear Duchess."

And he left her to think it over.

It was growing dark when the Prince unfastened his skiff and sculled out across the lake under the blink of the stars. He was in a very serious mood, for he knew that the affair was serious, and that a crisis had arisen in his life.

"If I were a poor fisherman," he thought, "I should be free. But would Marie love the fisherman?"

A full moon showed its silver rim above the hills as he drew towards the little white villa. He moored his skiff, and climbing the steep path, found someone in white waiting for him at the gate where the flowering shrubs made a smother of dim colour.

"Marie."

His voice had a new appeal, and as she slipped into his arms she felt that the man in him had been stirred to some more solemn tenderness.

"Something has happened, Rodolph?"

"I have visitors."

"Ah!"

"Count Crambach, Baron Burin, the Duchess of Daun."

She held closer to him.

"So they want to take you away from me. I know it."

"I have orders to be the Prince and not the man."

Later, in the little loggia of the white house, he told her everything. She lay in a long chair, and he sat beside her on a cushion, his head resting against her shoulder, and one of her hands in his. The moon looked down upon two lovers.

"They want me for their blood-game. At present they regard me as a sort of traitor, and treachery is not permitted. I am one of the figure-heads, to be put at the head of an army, to glitter while the poor devils are pushed to the shambles. And all for this silly world of diamonds and sashes and gold braids and stars."

She put an arm about his head.

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"Can the man be the Prince?"
 "Marie—should I cease to be the Prince, would that matter to you?"
 "It is the man who matters."
 "You swear it?"
 "I swear it."
 "You would hold to me?"
 "So long as the man—wants me."
 He got up on his knees and kissed her forehead.

"That is the voice of my good angel. What do other



"I have had orders to marry you"

things matter? And to-morrow—this Daun woman is coming to see you. We know what she will say. She will be supercilious, benignant, as though she were advising two foolish children. You know what I wish you to say?"

"What shall I say?"

"That you are my wife."

"That will mean nothing to them. For them—I do not exist."

"But you will say it—because Rodolph the man does not take two wives."

The moon was high when the Prince

returned to Monte Rosa. The Count and Baron Burin were playing billiards, and the Prince desired them to continue their game.

"The Duchess has gone to bed?"

"No, sir. I think she is enjoying the moonlight. Will his Highness grant me ten minutes before he retires?"

"With pleasure, Count. Here, in the billiard-room, at midnight."

He went out through the garden to the terrace above the lake and found the Duchess reclining there in the moonlight.

"I trust that your Highness has spent a pleasant, domestic evening?"

The Prince stood gazing at the lake.

"A most perfect evening. Madame Zerlinka desired

me to say that she will feel honoured by a visit from the Duchess of Daun."

"I suppose, sir, that two foolish people have been swearing eter-

nal fidelity to each other?"

"My dear Duchess, I have merely been spending an evening with my wife."

At midnight he interviewed Count Crambach, and heard from that fierce old diplomat much that he had expected to hear. Crambach was respectful but pitiless. The Prince's illustrious father would insist upon his son's abandoning this eccentric other-life and all that it implied, and especially Marie Zerlinka. It was essential that the Prince should be the Prince and nothing but the Prince.

"Thank you, Crambach," he said. "It is a pleasure to deal with a man who does

not grovel. I take it this is an ultimatum from my illustrious father—and all the notables of the League of the Red Eagle?"

"Your Highness is requested not to refer to the League. His Majesty's wish is sufficient."

Rodolph glanced at his watch.

"To be frank, Crambach, I wish that all the red men were at the bottom of the lake. But it is one o'clock. I shall require two days to think this over."

"His Highness can command a week."

"And then I marry your red-headed Duchess."

"That is so, sir."

"And abandon poor Marie. The life of a royal person is very exacting!"

At three o'clock on the following day Brunhilde, Duchess of Daun, stepped into the Prince's shabby little carriage and drove to call on Marie Zerlinka. Her condescension was a duty to her country and her class. And Marie received her with an air of innocent serenity. If she was afraid of the Duchess she did not show her fear.

They talked with complete frankness.

Said Brunhilde: "You will think me prejudiced, but I advise you to go back to your singing. If you rely on Rodolph's loyalty, you will have cause to regret it. The official wife will have all the advantage."

"You mean, madam, that you and yours will crush me out of his life?"

"Crush is hardly the word to use. You will be extruded. It will not be difficult."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure. Tradition is stronger than a little-passing infatuation. In a year the Prince will have been cured of his eccentricities."

"I doubt whether you know the real Prince."

"My dear little fool, I know our Court, and therefore I warn you. Go back to your singing."

When the Duchess returned to Monte Rosa she was given to understand that his Highness had expressed a wish to see her when she came back from her drive. Brunhilde found him alone on the terrace, reading one of his absurd books. She came down the steps with an air of laughing-good humour. Laughter is an excellent corrective.

"My dear Rodolph, how could you?"

She sat down, glowing with amusement. "A dear little thing. But Rodolph——! Oh, my noble stars! She looked like a scared little shop-girl, sucking a finger."

The Prince put down his book.

"Your visit seems to have amused you."

"It did. It was delicious. Have you ever noticed her wrists and ankles——?"

"It is a peculiarity of mine—to prefer a healthy plumpness. I have always found Marie's manners equal to anything."

"No! But, my dear Rodolph, a shop-girl who talks about the Prince as though she were speaking of her dear Herr Schmidt—the grocer. I wanted to laugh——"

He gave her a look of veiled fierceness.

"Indeed! Marie can behave with the best of us. It was the way she carried herself on the stage——"

"Oh, the stage! Ask her to dine here and you would see."

"I'll ask her."

"My dear Rodolph——!"

"She shall dine here to-morrow night, and I'll bet you she will keep her dignity."

"We wear our war paint?"

"Every diamond and star you can crowd on."

"It's a bet. I'll wager my new English car against that book of yours. And the judge?"

"May I suggest that I am capable of judging? You will trust to my sense of honour."

The Duchess rose and curtsied.

Some time next day the Prince visited Marie Zerlinka's house and took with him his ribbon of the "Blue Eagle." He found Marie calm and smiling, for in her wisdom she knew that smiles were better than tears.

Rodolph explained the affair to her, but without betraying the full insolence of the Duchess's attitude.

"I want these people to see you as you really are. I know that you can shame this woman. You will wear the ribbon of the 'Blue Eagle.'"

She smiled. "And my diamonds?"

"Yes. Though I have never given you diamonds."

"You have given me something better. Is it not a fact, Rodolph, that this woman thinks that I do not know how to behave?"

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"She has the evil eye and likes to use it. But it will do you no harm. And afterwards—I shall make my official announcement. So, you see, little Marie will have another stage triumph."

She held his arms and looked up into his face.

"If you should ever regret this, my beloved——"

He kissed her and laughed.

"Does anyone regret being free? Especially when one owns half a railway in South America, and a mine in Mexico. You shall go round the world, singing, with a vagabond husband in shabby clothes."

"But—Rodolph, sometimes—I should like a little home like this."

"Well—why not? A fellow must have somewhere to keep his books!"

The dinner was a very stiff affair, and from the moment that Marie Zerlinka entered the salon the Prince knew that Brunhilde was not playing fair. She had dragged the two men into the conspiracy. Count Crambach's white moustachios and fierce eyes were to assist in the disturbing of a little woman's self-confidence. Baron Burin was to stare and to look blandly surprised, as though he expected the Zerlinka to use a knife when she should have used a fork.

Marie came in smiling. She was in white, with the Prince's blue sash across her bosom. She was introduced to the grandees, and she curtsied and continued to smile. At dinner she did not utter a word. The Prince talked, so did the Duchess; old Crambach growled; Burin agreed politely with everybody. And Marie smiled, like a child who was at her ease, and completely happy. She smiled into Crambach's fierce eyes, and at the Duchess's epigrams; the glitter seemed to delight her, the stars, sashes, diamonds and gold braid. The Prince was wearing a black velvet coat and a soft collar, and a smile that echoed Marie's. He loved her; he loved her for the way she sat there like a beautiful, unselfconscious thing, baffling the eyes and tongues of the three conspirators. The pose was perfect. They might just as well have tried to disconcert the full moon when it rose to shine upon the lake.

The Prince watched Brunhilde, but the woman of the world showed no chink in her armour.

"My dear Duchess," he said, "have you heard Mademoiselle Zerlinka sing?"

"No, I have not had the pleasure."

"Splendid! We will have our coffee on the terrace, and Marie shall sing to us."

Old Crambach pulled his white moustachios. What could you do with an infernal child who sat and smiled at you, as though you were an elderly angel in a red sash with a gold star on your shirt front?

They adjourned to the terrace. The full moon was up, sending a ladder of light across the lake, and making the cypresses look like black ghosts. The night was very still. It was a soft and gentle night, quite empty of any sense of tragedy. The Duchess's red cloak drifted down amid the flowering shrubs; old Crambach's bald white head looked as benign as the moon.

There were chairs and a table. A servant appeared with coffee and liqueurs.

The Duchess made a sign to him.

"By me, please."

She was lighting a cigarette, and she smiled at the Prince.

"Really—this is charming. I feel that I must be responsible for the coffee. And the nightingale is going to sing."

The Prince stood up.

"Marie—if I fetch my violin?"

"Send for it."

"No. Not even Hugo touches my Strad."

He turned and went towards the steps, and in the shadow of one of the cypresses the Duchess was pouring out coffee.

"Sugar, mademoiselle?"

"If you please, madam."

"Baron, will you hand Mademoiselle Zerlinka her coffee?"

Burin, brisk and bland, took the cup and presented it to Marie. His body bent towards her. Really, one could not feel so very hostile to such a pretty creature.

"Coffee, Count."

Brunhilde's voice was casual. She recovered her cigarette and blew smoke towards the moon. The Count's spoon made a tinkling sound inside his cup; Burin was helping himself to a liqueur.

Suddenly something broke upon the flagstones. A white shape rose, tottered towards the balustrade, uttered a cry of "Rodolph," and sank in a smother of whiteness.

And that was what the Prince saw as

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he came down the steps—a white shape, the two startled men bending forward and looking down at her, and between them Brunhilde—Duchess of Daun—erect in her red cloak, cynical, triumphant.

The Prince forgot to consider his precious violin. He came down the steps with a face of fear and of fury, pushed Burin aside, and bent over his wife. Her face was pale as the moon, and one arm lay folded under her head.

"What happened?"

Burin, the soft-hearted, behaved like a fool.

"I had just handed her a cup of coffee. We were talking—and suddenly——"

"Who poured out the coffee?"

The men were silent, and Rodolph understood.

The Duchess shrugged her shoulders, and looked down from the height of her pride.

"Your Highness is a little excited. Mademoiselle Zerlinka is not dead, nor will she die. But I think I ought to warn you, sir, that her heart is weak, and that a second attack might prove fatal."

The Prince looked at her.

"And you would persuade me—by threatening this child?"

"We are merciful, but we wish your Highness to understand that this infatuation will not be permitted."

"To be frank——?"

"You will not expose poor Marie to a second attack."

Rodolph turned and looked at his wife, and for a moment he appeared a broken man. He covered his face. Silently he seemed to be bowing himself before a power that was pitiless and inexorable.

"There must be no scandal," he said suddenly.

He raised a weary head, and felt his wife's gloved hand. Burin turned away; old Crambach stood and glared; the Duchess was faintly smiling.

"There will be no scandal," she said. "Shall we order your Highness's carriage? Mademoiselle Zerlinka has had a fainting fit and will be better at home."

The Prince was bending over his wife as though he were taking leave of her.

"Poor Marie. Yes—I surrender. Baron, will you please see that the carriage is ordered? I will take her back to her house."

The Duchess interposed.

"Your Highness, would it not be more tactful to allow me——?"

He sprang up.

"No; hang your tact. I suppose I can show her one last piece of tenderness. Count, will you please arrange for our departure to-morrow morning? I will go and kiss my illustrious father's hands."

It was Rodolph who carried Marie Zerlinka to the carriage. Consciousness had returned, a kind of wondering, half-vacant consciousness. He put his mouth close to hers.

"Not a word. All's well."

They watched him place Marie in the carriage, and as he was about to enter it the Duchess touched his arm.

"We shall expect your Highness in an hour."

"You can expect me in two hours," he retorted with the fierceness of a man acknowledging defeat.

The moon smiled overhead; three hours had elapsed, and Count Crambach grew restless.

"His Highness is long in returning."

"Poor fellow," said Burin, "one must allow him a little—emotion."

They sat for another hour, before Count Crambach got up with a growl, and lit a match to look at his watch.

"We had better walk over to the woman's house, Burin."

They went. They found no lights there and no carriage, but only a frightened old Italian woman who was brought out of bed by the noise made by these two eminent gentlemen.

It appeared that Marie Zerlinka had driven off somewhere in a carriage. She had stopped at the house for less than twenty minutes. Yes, she had changed her dress, and the old woman had seen a man carrying a valise.

"Did anyone go with her?"

"Yes, his Highness—the Prince——"

Crambach turned away with a growl.

"Three hours—and the frontier only twenty miles away!"

Burin shrugged his shoulders, and in the heart of him there was a little secret elation.

"The Duchess has gone to bed. Do you think she should be told, Count?"

"Oh, damn the Duchess," said old Crambach. "I always thought she was too infernally clever."

Two Innocents

By
WARWICK DEEPING

(36)

IT was March, and cold, with occasional scuds of snow, but Lewick village went to church in that queer, grim, whitewashed house of God where old Mr. Lorrimer and his granddaughter sat in the Lorrimer pew like death and life shut up together.

If Lewick church was grotesque, so was its congregation and its ritual. The farmers who tramped in from the outlying farms, or drove down from the wilderness of Bilberry Down, fraternized in the porch and carried their conversation from pew to pew. Job Bannister, who rang the bell, would stop every half-minute to spit on his hands. John Ditch, the clerk, would come out of the vestry, open the door of the great iron stove, and kick the coals.

Mr. Mompesson, the parson, was blind in one eye.

"Mr. Lorrimer here, John?"

"Not yet, sir."

They always waited for Mr. Lorrimer in Lewick.

"Coming up the aisle, sir."

Mr. Mompesson emerged from the vestry and walked to the two-decker pulpit, where John Ditch sat below him to help with the responses and to look after the stove. Mr. Lorrimer felt the cold; he was very thin and very old and very quick-tempered.

"Here beginneth— Kick the coals, John; it's cold."

The Lorrimer pew was a square oak room filling up the whole of the right transept, and opposite it stood the Donnison pew, a pew that had always been empty since Mary Donnison died; but on this March morning the Lewick folk saw a lad sitting in it, a lad of eighteen, with serious blue eyes and a ruddy face. It was young Jack Donnison, from Don-

nison Hall. And Lewick wondered. The lad was looking all the while at the dark-eyed girl in the Lorrimer pew, but she, conscious of the grim eyes of her grandfather, kept her glances on her book.

Mr. Mompesson mumbled through his sermon; John Ditch intoned his last "Amen," and the congregation clattered away to its dinner. The lad in the Donnison pew had slipped out during the last prayer. He was leaning against one of the buttresses close to the stone steps and the private doorway of the Lorrimer pew.

Mr. Lorrimer came out, tapping with his stick. His chin and his nose were like the horns of a new moon, with a lipless, sarcastic mouth between them. Rose followed him, turning up the fur collar of her cloak.

Mr. Lorrimer did not see Jack Donnison, but the girl did. A bright flush went over her face; they looked at each other steadily for two seconds, but neither of them spoke.

The lad nodded, smiled, and pointed at an old square tomb that lay on the left side of the path leading to the gate. Mr. Lorrimer walked slowly, still tapping with his stick, and Rose, following him, paused for a moment by the tomb to pick up something that had been tucked away in a crevice between two bricks.

She slipped the little piece of paper into her glove, turned and smiled at Donnison.

"I like you," said her eyes.

The lad's eyes were bolder.

"I love you," was their message.

The Lorrimer carriage drove the old man and the girl back to Dead Tree Hall, where the wind snored in the elms and sent a scud of last year's leaves fluttering across the park. The house was a great grey Georgian mansion, square as

a box, with a portico stuck on its southern face, its long windows the colour of ice. It was a cold house, precise, correct, severely yet sceptically religious. Dinner was ready in the dining-room, with its Turkey carpet, mahogany furniture, and portraits of the Lorrimeres on the walls. Not a word was spoken during the meal. At the end of it Griggs, the butler, put the port on the table and walked softly out of the room.

Mr. Lorrimer filled his glass and began to crack nuts.

"Who was the puppy in the pew?" he asked with characteristic abruptness.

"Which pew, sir?"

He had always insisted on her calling him "Sir." Old Lorrimer was an autocrat; his only son had flouted him, and he had retaliated on life by tyrannizing over his dead son's daughter. Age often clings to authority; it is its last chance of self-expression—that and the making of some cunningly repressive will.

"You are not blind," sneered her grandfather.

"Do you mean Mr. Jack Donnison?" she asked, helping herself to an apple.

"So you know him?"

"By sight, sir."

"All the Donnisons are blackguards," said her grandfather. "Do you know what a blackguard is?"

She hung her frightened head.

"A bad man, sir."

"A bad man who makes fools of women."

He smiled at her with his cruel and intelligent eyes.

"All women are fools—sentimental idiots. If that young puppy comes to church again just to stare at you, you will not go to church until Mr. Josiah Pedder comes to stay."

She raised her eyes and gave her grandfather one scared look, and then resumed the peeling of her apple.

"Is he coming to stay, sir?"

"Yes."

"Will it be soon?"

"That interests you, does it? I approve of your interest, my dear Rose, in the man you are going to marry."

She made no answer, but went on peeling her apple. She was never sure whether Mr. Lorrimer was a mass of sarcasm, or whether he was a coldly religious man who took life with dry

seriousness. She did not wish to marry Josiah Pedder. He was a young man who filled her with a kind of feverish horror, perhaps because he was so cold, so precise, so smoothly pleasant, so successful. She had an idea that he was cruel, as cruel as her grandfather.

"I have not made up my mind, sir——"

He shot a swift look at her. Even the mildest protest was not allowed.

"Mind! What do you want with a mind? A woman should leave that to her husband. Josiah Pedder will supply the mind."

No more was said. Rose retreated to her room, and Mr. Lorrimer walked into the library, lay down on the horsehair sofa in front of the fire, put a silk handkerchief over his face and went to sleep.

Rose stood at the window of her room, looking out upon the park, the grey slopes of Bilberry Down, and the blue distances of Ashdown Forest. It was snowing again, but what did that matter? She put on her cloak, pulled up the fur-lined hood and escaped into the park.

She made for the plantation of young firs in the valley on the other side of the hill, and out of sight of the house; but she was a timid thing, and there were moments when her heart misgave her and she was ready to turn back. She could not forget the acrid finality of her grandfather's voice: "All the Donnisons are blackguards." "A blackguard is a man who makes a fool of a woman."

She shivered, for this adventure meant so much to her. It was the first secret act of rebellion that she had ever dared to make, and perhaps it was all the more dear to her because it seemed likely to be the last. This boy! He was no older than she was, and yet her youth ran to the youth in him as something that was alive, something that would understand. And yet she was afraid, afraid of the one thing that a woman fears—disillusionment. "The Donnisons are blackguards." Was it true?

He was there, waiting, leaning against a tree, a strong lad and old for his age. He flushed when he saw her; his blue eyes had little shimmers of light in them.

"You've come! God bless you!"

She was astonished both by his serious, boyish fervour and by the unexpectedness of those words. She stood looking at him, her hands clasped together inside her

TWO INNOCENTS

muff. He seemed all eyes—shy, devoted, grave, incredulous eyes. It was the first time that they had ever spoken to each other.

"I ought not to have come."

She was frightened, and he saw that she was frightened, and it touched him. The Donnisons might be a wild family—wild because they were generous and impulsive—but this lad was more than a Donnison. He had his dead mother's obstinate gentleness. At Winchester School he had been known as the "bully beater"; he had fought many great fights, and always in the cause of some weaker thing that was hurt or afraid.

"But you have come," he said. "You don't know how grateful I am. I suppose Mr. Lorrimer would be angry?"

"Oh, terribly angry."

"Does he bully you?"

She smiled up faintly into his serious eyes.

"You see, I am not allowed to have a mind or a will of my own. Even to-day he noticed you at church, and he was angry, because he said you stared."

"I suppose I did stare—just a little. I couldn't help it."

"I am not to be allowed to go to church again."

"What, because I stared at you?"

She nodded.

"Not until Mr. Pedder comes to stay with us, and he will take me to church."

Young Donnison frowned.

"I know. That sallow fellow who looks sly, and is always smiling as though he had stolen the back-door key into Heaven."

She laughed.

"That's Mr. Pedder exactly." And then her laugh died away. "But Mr. Lorrimer means me to marry him."

Donnison's head went up like the head of a boxer.

"What! You are to marry that fellow?"

"Yes."

She looked ashamed.

"But you don't want to? Of course you don't want to. Just say so, dear Rose."

She gave him a little tremulous upward glance.

"Of course I don't want to, John."

"Then you shan't," he said. "You shan't."

Delightful and adventurous self-con-

fidence of youth! How old Lorrimer was to be managed and the marriage prevented neither of them had the least idea, but Jack Donnison had always been a lad of his word. "I'll punch your head," and he punched it. "I'll have that nest," and the tallest tree was compelled to surrender. And from that moment the girl had a strange and most profound belief in him. If he had told her to jump out of her bedroom window she would have done it; he was her fate-predestined mate, and she his.

"When is that fellow coming?" he asked her.

"I don't know. Next month, perhaps. But what will you do?"

She had posed him, but he would not allow it; and he just squared up and looked gently obstinate.

"I shall have to think it over. If your grandfather is a gentleman, it will be all right."

"But he isn't a gentleman—I mean not in that way."

"The Lorrimeres never were. Oh, I beg your pardon, Rose."

"I quite understand, John," she said. "I can't say that being a Lorrimer has brought me any happiness."

And so the romance began, a romance that was to set Lewick by the ears and create a tradition among those forest folk, so much so that a girl could ask no more searching question of her lover than "Be you a Jack Donnison?" It began with humour, because the chief actor was so desperately serious that he surprised cynical people into laughter. And Lewick, because it had always hated the Lorrimeres—cold fish who could not love—found itself aiding and abetting the lover in one of the most quaint and original games of hide and seek that ever was played.

They met regularly in that wood, Rose and her lad, but not before Mr. John Donnison had taken the stage like a gentleman of Spain.

"This must be done properly," he told her. "I wish Mr. Lorrimer to have every opportunity of behaving like a gentleman. I shall see him in person."

He did.

It was said that the sedate Griggs listened at the keyhole, and so saved the story of that interview from being lost to Lewick and posterity. Don Quixote

stood with his back to the fireplace, very pale, stubborn and dignified.

"I have the honour to inform you, sir, that I am in love with your granddaughter. I wish to be permitted to pay my attentions."

Old Lorrimer jumped in his chair. At least, Griggs swore that he heard the chair creak as though the devil had sat down in it.

"Attentions! Bless my soul! And may I ask how old you are, Mr. Donnison?"

"Old enough to be a man of honour, sir."

Mr. Lorrimer saw the humour of it, but his sense of humour was of the acrid and spiteful order. He laughed, and his laughter was very like a sneeze. He asked Mr. Donnison to ring the bell.

"I will oblige you, sir, when you have given me an answer."

"Answer!" And there was venom in the old gentleman's voice. "I don't like puppies about the house. I keep them in the stable. You are a fob, boy, even for a Donnison."

"Thank you, Mr. Lorrimer," said the lover. "I wished to behave like a gentleman, and to give you the chance of behaving like a gentleman. Good morning."

And he walked out of the house.

Mr. Lorrimer lost his temper. He jumped up and rang for Griggs.

"Where is Miss Rose? Tell her to come here at once. And, Griggs——"

"Sir?"

"If that young man comes near this house he is to be kicked out of the park gates. You understand?"

Mr. Griggs understood. He went to find Miss Rose, and an hour later Kitty, the chambermaid, heard her weeping in her room.

"It's a shame," said the girl. "That old skeleton ought to be shut up in his coffin."

The romance developed rapidly after that meeting between Donnison and Mr. Lorrimer; but Lewick was quite unable to see how young Donnison could expect to grapple with the autocrat of Dead Tree Hall. It was a hopeless affair, a piece of boyish madness, and though Lewick was interested, it took it for granted that Rose would be married to Mr. Pedder. Rumour had it that the girl was a prisoner in the house, and that

the Lorrimer carriage had driven all the way up to London to bring Mr. Pedder to Lewick. The marriage was to be completed immediately, and Mr. Pedder would take his young wife back with him to his house in Bloomsbury.

Lewick saw him arrive. He drove through the village wearing a chimney-pot hat and a plaid shawl over his shoulders. He was sallow and supercilious; he looked at life with narrow, careful eyes; he was ambitious, coldly and successfully ambitious. He thought Lewick a stupid hole full of half-savage rustics, brown rabbits, calves, donkeys. The Lewick geese hissed at him as the carriage carried him across the green. It was Lewick's welcome to the "furriner."

Old Lorrimer met Mr. Pedder on the steps of the portico.

"What! Had a good journey? Come in. The girl is dying to see you."

He grinned. There were handshakes, mutual politenesses, a few facetious confidences, and they walked into the drawing-room. Rose was sitting on an ottoman in the middle of the room, dressed in white muslin, and looking as white as her dress. She got up and curtsied.

Mr. Pedder crossed over and kissed her, like a young attorney kissing the book in a court of law.

"Well, my dear Rose, charming as ever."

He was patronizing, complacent. The girl was to have a thousand pounds a year, and she was docile and well-disciplined; she would suit him admirably, and would never give him any trouble.

Rose poured out tea for them, and her hand shook so badly that the tea slopped into the saucer of Mr. Lorrimer's cup.

"Tsst! My dear, look what you're doing."

He could not resist being cruelly playful at her expense.

"It's excitement, Josiah. I can tell you she has been sitting at the window watching for the carriage."

Most certainly it was due to excitement, but not the excitement that Mr. Lorrimer ascribed to her, for this shy bird was about to escape from the cage. Jack Donnison, greatly daring, had borrowed a ladder from the stable yard and planted it under her window at twelve o'clock at

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night. He had stood there, whispering and holding her hand.

"They will never find us. I have bribed Roper at the toll gate to say he let a carriage through in the middle of the night. They will think we have gone to London. And we shall be playing at babes in the wood."

His fantastic plot had delighted her. He knew the forest country better than any gipsy, and Mrs. Marlot, the Donnison housekeeper, was sharing in the conspiracy.

"John," she said, "dear John, how romantic you are."

"You'll come? You will trust me?"

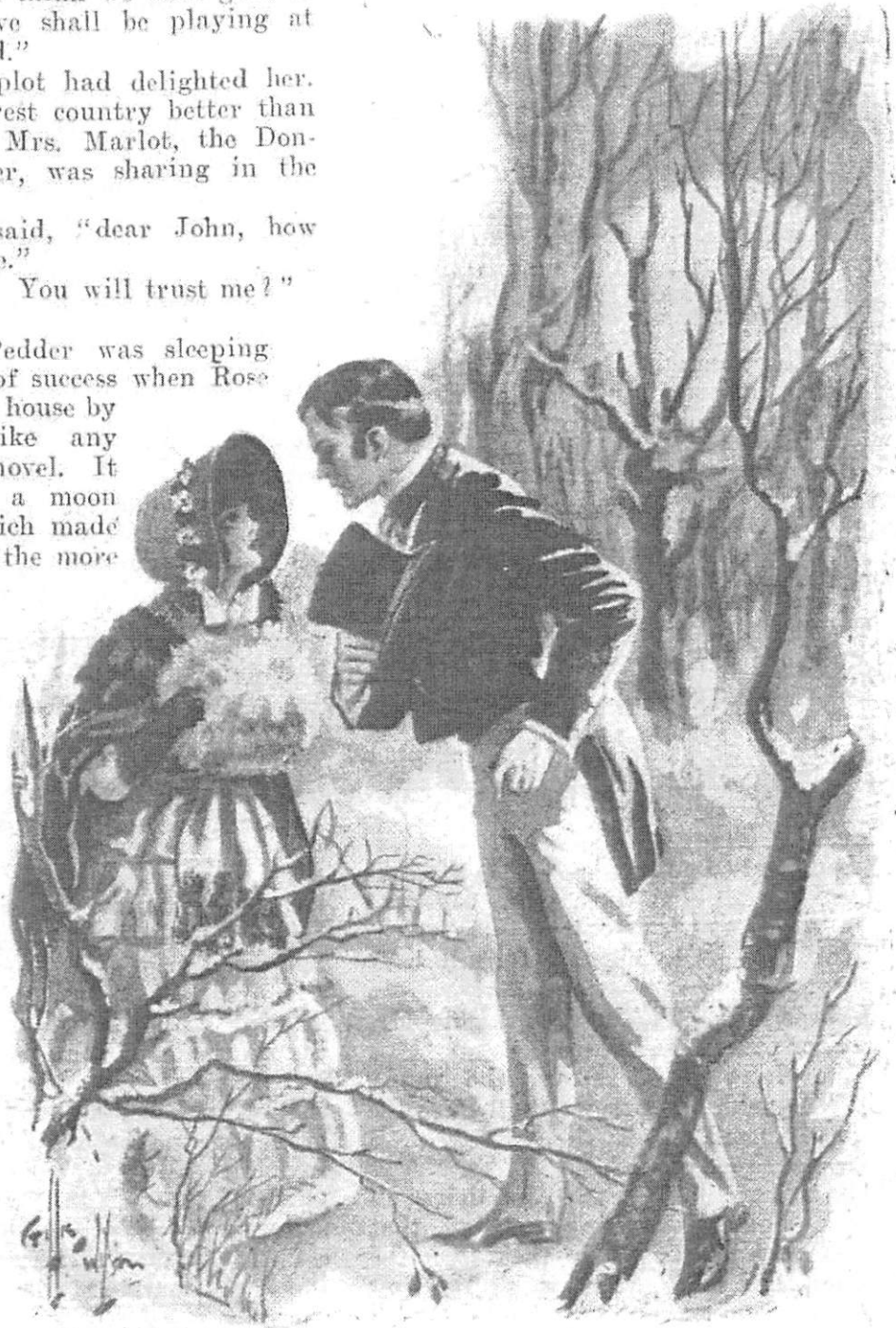
"Yes."

Mr. Josiah Pedder was sleeping the bland sleep of success when Rose escaped from the house by that ladder, like any heroine in a novel. It was May, and a moon was shining, which made the escapade all the more audacious.

Rose was dressed in her simplest and oldest clothes, a cloak and a hood, stout shoes, good, honest stockings. Jack Donnison shouldered her small bag, and together they made their way up to Bilberry Down and over it into the forest. They walked five miles, and the oaks of Buckhurst Wood stretched out their great arms to hide them.

The morning revealed an empty room, and the ladder under Miss Rose's window, and the feminine part of the household was in an ecstasy

over the affair, for women love to see domestic tyranny defied. It was Criggs who broke the news to Mr. Lorrimer, finding that gentleman still in bed.



She stood looking at him, her hands clasped together inside her muff. "I ought not to have come!" she said

"Something has happened to Miss Rose, sir. Her room is empty, and we have found a ladder——"

"What!"

Mr. Lorrimer pulled off his night-cap and jumped out of bed.

"She must be in the house, man."

"Perhaps Mr. Pedder may know something about it, sir."

Mr. Griggs's rare excursion into sarcasm passed unheeded, for Mr. Lorrimer was up and dressing, and looking rather like a fierce old bird.

"Have the carriage ready. Is Mr. Pedder awake?"

"No, sir."

"Then go and wake him, man, go and wake him. Don't stand there and stare."

There were alarms and excursions, and by nine o'clock Mr. Lorrimer and Mr. Pedder were on the road to Donnison Hall. They caught Squire Donnison at breakfast, a large, bluff, careless creature with a great ruff of fair hair and eyes the colour of "speedwell" blue. There was a scene, for Lorrimer and Donnison were ice and fire.

"I tell you, my dear sir, the young lady is not here."

"I shall search the house."

It was an indirect way of calling Mr. Donnison a liar.

"The devil you will! I think not, sir. There is the door. If my lad has run off with your granddaughter, so much the better for her. I admire her taste, sir—in ladders."

Mr. Lorrimer spat like a cat.

"Ladders! Ladders be— It's a case of abduction. I'll have your boy sent to Botany Bay!"

"You can go to blazes. I shall back my boy."

It was Mr. Pedder who got Mr. Lorrimer out of the house.

"The thing is to recover the young lady," he said. "Then we shall have the laugh of them."

Mr. Lorrimer agreed.

They drove off, made inquiries in Lewick, and, discovering nothing that was of any use to them, they took the London road and pulled up at the first toll-gate. The gate-keeper came out with an air of extreme apathy.

"Roper!"

"Sir?"

"Did you let anybody through here in the night?"

Roper pushed back his hat and scratched his head.

"Did I let anybody through in the night?"

"Yes. Hang it, isn't that a plain question?"

"Well, so it may be, Mister Lorrimer. Be you wanting to go through?"

Mr. Pedder laid a resting hand on Mr. Lorrimer's arm.

"What we want to know is, my man, did you pass a carriage through in the night?"

He threw Roper a guinea.

"Lord love you, sir, you want to know about a carriage? A gig, with the hood up, went through at one in the morning."

"Was young Donnison driving?"

"Maybe he was, sir. Come to think of it, it must have been young Mr. Donnison."

That settled it. Mr. Lorrimer sat up like an old Roman and gave the astonished coachman his orders.

"London, John!"

"London, sir? But the 'osses—"

"I said London, man. Aren't there horses to be hired in England? Get on—get on!"

So to London they went—fifty-odd miles, but they saw nothing and heard nothing of Mr. Jack Donnison and his gig.

Five miles from Lewick, and in the deeps of the forest, two young people were very busy outside what had been a charcoal burner's hut. It was thatched with heather, and the walls were of halved fir trunks dug into the ground. It stood in the Donnison country, in what had once been a little clearing among the beeches, but now it was hidden by a smother of brushwood and young trees, for no one ever came here. Close to the hut someone had rigged up a second shelter with an old rick-cover and some branches, and both hut and shelter were invisible till you came within twenty yards of them.

Rose had just put up her hair, and was standing in the doorway of the hut watching Jack Donnison, who was lighting the camp-fire.

"It's wonderful," she said. "How did you manage it?"

She turned round to look at the interior of the hut. It was hers, most sacredly hers, and it held a truckle bed, a little oak box, a chair, a wash-hand stand and an old black trunk, and the floor had been

strewn with rushes. He had remembered even a looking-glass and a pincushion full of pins.

Her lover reached for the frying-pan and the kettle.

"It took me a week," he said, "smuggling them up at night, you know."

"You carried them all the way from the Hall?"

"I did."

She looked at him with shining eyes, and becoming aware of his domestic activities, ran out to help him.

"No, this is my share. I'm going to do the cooking."

"Can you cook?"

"Of course I can cook."

They knelt and looked at each other, and then love quivered into laughter.

"You will be the great hunter, Jack, just like the Indian tales. I shall call you 'Great Heart.'"

He kissed her.

"And you are Laughing Water, or Shadow Eyes."

"I like Shadow Eyes," she said.

They cooked their breakfast and sat down to eat it under the green roof of the trees. Jack Donnison explained the simple details of the adventure. Only Mrs. Marlot knew where they were, and Mrs. Marlot had a head on her shoulders and her heart in the conspiracy. Every other night she was going to lower a basket of food out of her bedroom window, and there would be a note in the basket giving them the news.

"I shall go for the food when everybody is asleep," he explained, "and if I can't do a little thieving in our own garden—well, then I never robbed an orchard. And I can snare rabbits, and catch fish down in Buckhurst Pool. I would have brought a gun, but then we might have old Lavender on the war-path on the look out for poachers."

It was so simple and yet so subtle. And then it occurred to Rose to wonder what her grandfather and Mr. Pedder were doing.

"Driving hell for leather up to London," said the lad.

The idea of it was so delicious that they laughed unrestrainedly, joyously.

"Can't you see the dust flying?"

"And poor dear grandfather blowing his nose a great deal and getting cross with everybody!"

"They won't find us in London. They'll go to Bow Street, and advertise in the papers!"

"Oh, dear, it's too delicious!"

"Perhaps they'll go rushing to Scotland—all the way to Gretna!"

"And we are here all the time. Oh, Jack, you wicked boy!"

Days went by, and all Lewick was puzzled, and even casual and good-natured Roger Donnison began to wonder what had happened to his son. If the young people had eloped, where had the money come from? For Jack's allowance was not of such a magnificence that it could pay for post-horses and post-boys, lodgings and service. The girl was an heiress, but her money was tied up, though, of course, she might have sold some of her jewellery to help the finances of the adventure.

Mrs. Marlot's letters, hidden in the secret food basket, supplied these two babes in the wood with news. Mrs. Marlot was brief and to the point, even when she dealt with rumours.

"Mr. Lorrimer has sent the carriage back from London. The gossip is that he has gone to Scotland."

"All Lewick is on your side, Mr. Jack. Mr. Donnison is beginning to look worried."

"Yesterday Mr. Lorrimer returned."

"Mr. Lorrimer drove over to-day to see Mr. Donnison. May I be forgiven for listening outside the door! The news is that Mr. Pedder is married! A rich widow in London! A bird in hand, my dear! Mr. Lorrimer furious."

Faithless, mercenary Josiah! But what triumphant news for the two innocents in Buckhurst Wood, two sunburnt young people who were living the life of gipsies. Mrs. Marlot's basket had included fresh strawberries and a bottle of gooseberry wine, and the woodlanders celebrated.

Another week went by, with this idyll of the woods losing nothing of its innocence, and then towards the end of June one of Mrs. Marlot's scrawls left Jack with a serious, troubled face. Rose, brown as a berry, and busy on her knees beside the fire, looked at him anxiously.

"Is the news bad, Great Heart?"

He passed her the letter.

"The dad's not well; he's worried."

"Why, dear, go and see him. Don't you think he will be on our side?"

And Great Heart went. He managed to slip through the garden and into the house without being seen, and he found his father in the library.

"You young scoundrel!"

But Mr. Donnison's anger was very much on the surface.

"Where is Miss Lorrimer?"

"In Buckhurst Wood, sir."

"Do you mean to tell me that you two have been living for six weeks in Buckhurst Wood?"

"We have, sir. I fitted up that old hut for Rose, and made myself a shelter."

Mr. Donnison lay back in his chair and laughed and laughed.

"Oh, great Jehoshaphat! Do you know that old Lorrimer has been chasing you half over England? And that Mr. Complete Prig of his got piqued and married a young widow? But, my dear John, my dear John, are you married?"

"Married! Why, no, sir. Was it necessary? I mean I love every hair of Rose's head, and we have been so happy."

Mr. Donnison managed to control his laughter and to look grave at his son.

"Dear me, John! Exactly! Well, I somehow think you ought to consider the problem of getting married."

John stared.

"Really? Of course, I'm quite ready, sir. But what about Mr. Lorrimer?"

"I think I can settle Mr. Lorrimer," said his father.

John Donnison went back to Buckhurst Wood, and before turning in he knocked at the door of Rose's hut, with the stars looking down at him between the branches.

"Rose, are you asleep?"

"No. Is that you, Jack?"

"I saw the pater. He thinks he can arrange things with your grandfather."

"Dear, how splendid!"

"And, Rose——"

"Yes."

"He seems to think that we ought to get married."

There was a little silence, while Shadow Eyes smiled in her heart.

"Will you marry me, Rose?"

"Why, yes, dear."

"God bless you."

Mr. Donnison was a man of the world, though he had lived all his life in the country. He sat down and wrote Mr. Lorrimer a letter.

"DEAR SIR,—I have had a communication from my son. He wishes me to make you a formal proposal for the hand of your granddaughter——"

Mr. Lorrimer grew very excited when he had read the whole of that letter. He sat down and wrote a reply.

"SIR,—You can go to Jericho. I shall have your son charged with abduction."

Mr. Donnison smiled and replied:

"DEAR SIR,—I have no wish to go to Jericho. I prefer to go to the church with your granddaughter. What other solution can you suggest?"

Mr. Lorrimer reflected before returning an answer.

"SIR,—I believe that you are in collusion with your son. My granddaughter's honour must be vindicated."

Mr. Donnison smiled still more sweetly.

"DEAR SIR,—Your accusation is untrue, and I can prove it to be untrue. My son is a man of honour. The only vindication that is required is for us to stop all gossip and to make the young people happy. May I say that the Donnisons are not beggars?"

Mr. Lorrimer fired a last shot.

"SIR,—You will inform me as to the whereabouts of Miss Lorrimer and your son. I refuse to treat in the dark."

Mr. Donnison replied:

"DEAR SIR,—My son refuses to disclose his place of residence until he has received from you a written consent to his marriage with Miss Lorrimer."

Then Mr. Lorrimer surrendered.

"SIR,—To save a scandal I agree to your son's marriage with Miss Lorrimer. Will you take steps to have me informed of her present address?"

Mr. Donnison ordered out his gig and drove over to Dead Tree Hall. The two old men were very stiff and very polite.

"I shall have much pleasure in driving you to see your granddaughter."

And Mr. Donnison drove him to Buckhurst Wood.

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Somewhere in the Thames Valley he discovered a bungalow upon whose gate were painted the mystic words "No Humbug"

LIFE'S THREE *Best Things*

By WARWICK DEEPING

A FRIEND declares that somewhere in the Thames Valley he discovered a bungalow upon whose white gate were painted the mystic words "No Humbug."

He swears that the bungalow was occupied by two young things but lately joined together in holy matrimony, perhaps as a concession to the conventions.

What Are The Conventions ?

But what are the conventions of to-day ? We old young things with some of the Victorian perfume still clinging to our clothes

are apt to feel bewildered and perplexed, for we are not allowed to wonder at life, or to speak any longer of the mystery of things. Should one lapse into sentiment in the presence of the new cleverness, we are advised to study colloidal chemistry, and the factors of heredity, and the latest monograph with the biological behaviour of some obscure insect.

Dare We Say "Love" ?

It has come to such a pass with us that the things we considered decent have become indecent, and the only decencies are the

indecencies. For how shall we dare in the presence of the neo-realists to utter the word "Love"? We blush, we stammer, we are ashamed. The cold bright eye of the young realist is upon us. Love indeed! We are scathingly reprov'd. How dare we put our foolish fingers into that sickly and mouldy jam-pot. Love is nothing but a biological reaction, a turgidity of certain tissues. We listen to the new voice saying: "Birth control shifted the emphasis in sex life from the procreational to the recreational."

Complacently Disillusioned

As for marriage, dare we defend it in the presence of the complacently disillusioned? It is we who, still believing in these older social fallacies, are accused of being the hypocrites who substituted the cross for the phallic emblem. It is we who are indecent because of our cowardly decencies, as though we had draped the legs of our tables with velvet trousers.

We salute the new age for painting upon its garden gate that wild device: "No Humbug."

Humbly we take to ourselves the accusation: "You romanticists, cease from tosh."

We search our hearts, and that summary of our experiences which we call our philosophy of life, and yet, strive as we will to appreciate the bright new scientific values, we find in our pockets old-fashioned coins that satisfy us more supremely than do the nice new currency notes. We listen to the man of science, and he tells us that "life integrates," which is indeed very helpful. He warns us that emotion is indecent, a relic of savagery, and that the new scientific man will shed his emotions. There will be no kisses by moonlight, no anguish when some dear comrade dies. All that is barbarous. We shall all integrate into an icy, superior intelligence.

Things That Matter

But let us be bold. Let us declare that as mere men and women we have found certain human values that matter to us.

What of Health, Craftsmanship, Comradeship?

Without health life can be a sour business. In the argument between the exponents of heredity and environment, heredity appears to be proving itself more potent. Parentage matters supremely. Some of us suspected it long before chromosomes were christened.

Sound stock. But with the environmentalists one asks for more than cellular soundness. To me my mother and father were not lovable people because they were wholesome bodies. They were lovable and admirable because they were more than mere bodies, because they were wise and kind, and instilled into my young consciousness a belief in the essential goodness and rightness of certain human relationships. They did not bring up their children on chemical formulæ. We may be wiser than our own wisdom. If we have been given health of body and mind we owe something to those dear barbarians who believed in a God. If we choose to call him The Unknown Artist, and to continue to be that much-scorned imbecile the mystic, we are like children who regard the New Professor as not quite convincing when he tries to dress up as Father Christmas.

A Man's Joy in His Job

Next—craftsmanship, a man's joy in his job. The pity of it is that this joy seems to be denied to so many of the moderns, but to the man who has something of the creator in him—his craft is an eternal refreshment. It may be said that we create nothing; that we merely change matter from one appearance to another. It is agreed by the ultimate cleverness that we have no free will. We may say so, but during every hour of the day the plain man's actions contradict that dreary dogma, and the plain man is right. Nothing will convince him that when he has made his garden, or painted his picture, or built his house, he has not been exercising something inevitable and wholesome in himself. The philosopher, especially if he be of the dreary, disillusionist order, will be left haranguing empty chairs. He will be ready to convince us that there is no such thing as a chair, but we continue to sit on chairs and to value the virtues of chairs. We continue to exercise our free will upon the making of chairs. We agree that the Destructive Philosopher may be a very eminent and subtle person, but somehow the urge of life leaves him stranded. We—blindly believing in something we know not what—feel instinctively wiser than the pedant who bids us believe in some wordy abstraction. The joy of the job goes on.

Comradeship

Next—comradeship. Dare one breathe the words love and marriage? We shall see the smirk on the cold faces of the little clever

people. "Here comes the sob stuff." I have heard it stated by a critic that if a man is deeply moved by a play or a book, the art of that play or book is false and insincere. Well, that is rather limiting! We have to extrude the Bible, and the great men among the Greeks, and Shakespeare, and other interpreters of life. They played basely upon our emotions. They ladled out the jam. And yet these same critics will allow us any licence as to filthiness, as to the baser urges in man. If the hero is described as taking a bath with his mistress, that is life, that is art. If he is described as somehow bending before love with wonder and reverence—that is balderdash. Strange—is it not? That we should be told that in all our human relationships we are no better than some dirty-minded and undisciplined little boy.

But are we? It seems to me that our intellectuals have so spent themselves on sex in its cruder aspects, that they have become sterile. They remind one of those unpleasant old men whom one meets on occasions, and from whom one flies with disgust and contempt and pity. If you have your nose in the trough all the time you see little but trough.

Other Things Beside Sex

Some of us see other things. How is it that beautiful living, beautiful behaviour are not considered? How is it that when we see a portrait in one of the illustrated dailies we do not know until we have read the letterpress whether the hero has committed a particularly vile murder or grown a prize pumpkin? I agree that this must encourage the cultured cynics. But life—thank heaven—is not quite like the sensational press. There is a beauty in human behaviour that beautifies. It challenges that secret spirit in us and is answered. It can be so simple, so spontaneous, and yet so much the flower of years of quiet and kindly growth. It makes comradeship possible. Comradeship is with the people.

If I hold a shop-door open for a well-dressed woman and she sails by me without

a look or a word, what do I think of her? I think that there can be no beauty where she lives.

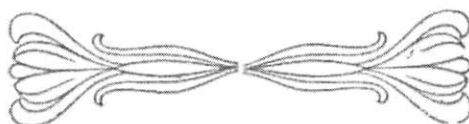
If I innocently jostle a working man and exclaim: "I'm sorry," and we smile upon each other and go our ways—I think—"There is comradeship in this."

If after years of adventures in the world's affairs two people are so besotted as to find pleasure and comfort and beauty in continuing to live together, shall we despair of humanity? We may be screamed at by certain shrill and advanced ladies who would have us believe that in the enlightened future there will be no preposterous old people called Darby and Joan. The commerce of the sexes will be a week-end affair, and so interesting and various that we shall spend all our time in taking off and putting on our clothes. There will be no lasting leisure for the condition we call comradeship. We shall just drink high-brow cocktails, celebrate the elemental rites, and depart in our several motor-cars.

Are We So Clever and Callous?

But shall we? Does nothing secret and good in us grow through the years? Are we to become so clever and callous that we shall not know the meaning of the words loyalty and compassion? Are we going to live with life as we might live with a pretty lady, for just as long as she piques an appetite and is satisfied with her plunder? Does it not happen that in the greater comradeship that two people bear their burdens together, and laugh together and are sad together, and cultivate the same garden, only to discover that they cannot do things apart? Is it sob-stuff to say that your comrade is more to you than life, because he or she has become so much a part of life that the loss of such a comrade may mean a taking away of all that makes life something better than an affair of the trough?

Let those of us who are somehow happy remember that we need not listen too seriously to the peevish and mocking voices of those unhappy experts in self-expression whose very egotism makes comradeship impossible.



Can Married Happiness Endure?

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By WARWICK DEEPING

The love of youth for maid has been the theme of novelists and poets throughout the ages. But the men and women of to-day are asking, cynically or despairingly, "Does love, can love endure . . . after twenty years of married life?"

THIS age of ours is an age of transition. Almost it might be called the age of transport in which we are hurried past the old, familiar landmarks and landscapes towards strange destinations. And often it would seem that the journey's end is no end at all.

It is an age of newness: new houses, new roads, of catastrophic changes in mechanical ideas, of new noises, new speeds. In a sense it is an age of youth, one of those ever-recurring periods in the history of our civilization when the violence and enthusiasms of youth work for good and for evil. Youth cannot wait; it is in a hurry. It demands quick results, that its seed shall germinate and grow and bloom all in twenty-four hours. It is an age in which one hears the howl of that wild young thing—Communism.

An Age of Discarding

It is an age of discarding. One might be tempted to conclude that the ideal of some of the moderns is to discard. From strength or from weakness? Shall it be a new car each year, a new dance, a new mate? Yet, if the wheel turns faster, does it change its spokes?

We may say that we are renewing the fabric of our civilization, the stone and the steel of it; but what of the live tissue?

Stone crumbles, steel crystalizes, but the human tissue goes on from generation to generation. Life endures.

Amid all this change and haste it behoves us to search for and cherish those things that endure, not a machine nor a mood, but those essential and human verities, that in himself which matters to man.

And what are the things that matter most?

Are they not the living mysteries of life, the mystery of loving, the mystery of a love that endures?

Is It Sentimental?

Need one fear to be laughed at as a sentimentalist because, with the wisdom of a supreme simplicity, one holds fast to some sacred, permanent happiness? It is the unhappy and the unsuccessful who mock, and if we are mocked at—it may be that we are happy. The cold, bright little face of a superficial cleverness may not comfort us. We like eyes that are more deep and tranquil, eyes in which the eternal mystery still dwells.

Mere speed may be an illusion. Time matters. The very rhythm of our hearts is part of our necessity. Almost instinctively the wise cherish old things, that which time has touched and smoothed and coloured, the sleekness of old turf, the polish on a cabinet, the weathering of stone, the texture of a fabric, the gentleness of an old garden. These things endure and comfort us. It is as though we recognized in them the very essence of that which is permanent and beautiful in the essential something of ourselves, that which is not mere matter, but that which is soul.

We may laugh at platitudes, but we live upon them. Yet—in these days—it may be quite an original thing to say that marriage is the supreme human relationship, and that it can and does endure. It is much more platitudinous to utter little cynical nothings.

But marriage! And what sort of marriage is it that endures? Having been a gardener nearly all my life, and having seen both garden and marriage growing in beauty and texture

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and in their sense of security, I have come to associate a garden with marriage. How long does it take to make a garden? Anything from ten to a hundred years. You may begin with a mere virgin field, grass, with hardly a tree in it; and marriage in its early years may be like that. You have to love your garden, to work in it, to plant things in it; and marriage is the same.

Like a Garden That Is Loved

It is so easy to carp and to gibe at marriage; but like a garden that is loved, it is the one great comradeship that does endure, with or without children, and sometimes in spite of children. For just as a garden grows more beautiful with age, so does the human relationship if both the gardeners have worked in it in a spirit of understanding. Moreover, the plants that you grow in that garden do not wither in a year. They are the perennial things, they have the steadfastness of trees; they have qualities that endure.

Not a Sort of Perpetual Cocktail

I—in my good fortune—have proved this, as thousands of others have proved it, and we—in our old and enduring gardens—can smile when ironic faces look over the wall.

"What are you old sentimentalists doing in there? Come out and join the neo-realists. You are shut up in a silly illusion."

But we stay where we are. Probably we are at peace. We do not ask that life should be a sort of perpetual cocktail party. We have other sacraments.

I say that happiness in marriage can endure, and that there is but one other happiness that is like it and can endure: man's joy in his work, or woman's happiness in hers.

Now, how does this happiness endure, and



why? Because, like a garden, marriage must be alive, and no such human relationship can be alive without love. You will hear it said: "That it is fatal to marry for love"—or "That only one of the partners should be in love"—or "That a nice, chilly friendliness is the best that can be hoped for." They say to us—"Put your love in cold storage and cultivate a pleasant reasonableness."

Marriage Dies by Boredom

We are told that married love cannot endure, that it dies of boredom, of a platitudinous propinquity, or worry, of jealousy between the parents because of the children, of faithlessness, of mere silliness. Certainly, in many marriages it does so die. It is killed by one or the other of the gardeners, by neglect, or by foolishness, or by a selfish withholding of the things upon which it must live. Or—it was never there. Or it was a

CAN MARRIED HAPPINESS ENDURE?



Over the
gateway of
happy marriage
is written:
*Walk gently,
speak softly.
The sinner
is he who
wounds*

THE QUIVER

mere stove plant hurried into blossom, and then put out to face the rigours of open-air reality.

But the other plant is different. It grows more strongly and hardy under the stress of life's weather.

The Blindness of Man

One is moved to wonder at the blindness of man. Generations come and go, and yet there is the same confusion, the inability to distinguish between sacred and profane love. The one may die in a night, the other outlasts death. When mere lust has set its seed the business may be over. With love the way of the gardener is different. It is so simple and yet full of the subtlety of feeling.

For this love has compassion, tenderness, understanding. Its happiness ceases if one or other of the partners is unhappy. It has patience; it can forbear; it can be unselfish. It knows restraint. It does not chatter and complain. It can be silent, deeply and significantly silent.

No Haphazard Blessing

This love and its happiness is no incidental thing, no haphazard blessing. It begins with romantic love, and somehow—because of and in spite of life's stresses—it continues to keep an element of romance. But all through the years it has to be cherished and worked for. You cannot leave a garden uncared for, or it will go derelict. So many people do not seem to realize that marriage has to be worked for in just the same way, year in, year out, with patience, wisdom, tenderness, and understanding.

We all know the sort of gardener who does a little shallow digging, buys a few packets of seed, and scatters the seed, and then expects Nature to do the rest. This gardener soon tires; he wants his results to be swift and easy, and when life does not bloom according to his facile fancy, he grows petulant, and loses his love for it. He has not that in him that endures, and yet he expects the happiness of marriage to endure, unwatered and untended. He is a fool as to the weather; he is a fool as to the eternal cussedness of things; he is a fool as to the weeds. If seed fails, you must sow again, and he who sows and labours in good faith will not reap failure.

What Two Qualities?

One is asked—"What are the two qualities that are most potent in the production of a happy and an enduring marriage?"

I would say—"In the woman—gentleness; in the man—generosity."

For, consider gentleness, and all that it implies. It may not be a modern virtue, and that is where I think so many modern women fail in marriage. Gentleness seems to them a slave virtue. It is not clamorous, and progressive, and pragmatical. No, but in it the very essence of love dwells, for if a woman has understanding she is gentle, and being that, all that life can give may come to her. It comes to drink of her gentleness, and to be soothed by it, to be shamed by it, to have its silly angers cooled and assuaged. I know. All through my life I have given thanks for someone's gentleness, her tranquillity. Does any other quality so chasten the strident beast in man? Does any other quality last so well? It is like the shadow of trees, and sunlight that is unafraid, still water, rain after drought.

So in man, generosity, and not the mere giving of material things, but in his bearing towards life. In a garden the little, mean, fussy fellow is apt to be a failure. He starves his garden; he is suspicious, almost you can see him pulling his most precious plant out of the ground to make sure that its roots are in order. In marriage, meanness is like a souring of the soil.

As to Children

Then, as to children. One has seen the intimacy and faith of marriage destroyed by children. There are the little jealousies, the little conspiracies, the selfishnesses that combine and take sides. In some families one sees the father treated as an enemy to be placated or as a rather foolish person to be ridiculed. Is it not very true that the souls of the parents are reflected in the children, because, in those marriages where the man and the woman have worked unselfishly together this blight does not show itself? Given a wholesome heritage one would say that the children of a happy marriage do not fail their parents. Their youth is spent in this same garden, and the memory of it endures through life. They have seen happiness in action, a quiet beauty of living and loving that gives to them that most precious possession—a faith in humanity.

The determinists will have it that all life is pre-ordered and arranged, and that free will is an illusion. Accept that scientific dogma, and where is life? Man may be called a little megalomaniac, an egocentric creature,

(Continued on page 1080)

hearts, looked him straight in the face. His eyes opened. He smiled.

"Why, Daddy," he said dreamily, and in a faint voice, "we've been in church. I saw you and Mummy standing by the altar. And did you see the lovely lights? It hurt my eyes. Did it hurt yours? I had to go towards it. It—oh, it *drew* me along! But you held me *so* tight, Daddy. Aren't you strong, Daddy! Then the light went out! Why did it go out, Mummy? Was it the moon?" He closed his eyes, and they heard him murmur again, very faintly: "How strong you are, Daddy!" His lips closed.

"Oh, Robin . . . he . . . is . . . dead!"

"No, no! Hold on to him. *Hold!* Hold as long as he breathes!"

So the minutes went on apace, and still they remained, silent, holding on to the spark of life that they had brought into the world. So long were they that the doctors at last apologetically, curiously and quietly came into the room. They tiptoed over to the bed and gazed in amazement at the boy. The specialist bent over him. Pressed his ear gently against the chest. Beckoned to the other doctor. Felt the pulse. And then whispered helplessly:

"All I can say is that I am amazed. Completely and utterly *amazed!* That boy is sleeping perfectly normally. . . ."

The two doctors stared at each other across the bed in a puzzled frown. The local doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Well, seeing is believing," he said.

In the morning, the boy was cool and rested. He began to mend and never looked back. At the end of ten days, both doctors suggested country air. Thea discussed it alone with her husband.

"Take him back to Dorset, Robin. And keep him there. I will, if I may, see him periodically."

"The boy's place is at the farm. It is your place, too, Thea. He needs you. The farm needs you. And I—I need *you*, too. . . ."

Jimmu, the peak of his old hat pulled down over his eyes to slant off the afternoon rain, drew the horse and trap up in the yard. The Lil' Fella' leaped up excitedly and gazed about him.

"Why!" he shouted. "Oh, *look!* There's Rags! And there's Dooley! And—oh, there's Mamsie!" He had leaped down before they could prevent him, and raced across the cobbled way, shouting: "Oh, Mamsie, here I am! Have you made any lovely chocolate cakes for my tea?"

And, hurrying out bareheaded, regardless of the rain, wiping two big tears from her eyes, Mamsie assured him that there *were!*



Can Married Happiness Endure?

By WARWICK DEEPING

(Continued from page 1072)

an absurd person who must make gods to strut in his own image.

But we must will certain things, or be less than beasts in a cage. It may be that the very core of mystery is the mystery of our willing. We can will ourselves to beautiful behaviour, and that is a quality so little studied. Surely there is something supreme and admirable in beautiful living, and a courage and patience and compassion that are as alive as flowers and not mere dead things in a bottle? And in these rare and happy marriages beautiful living can be seen in full flower.

But we must cultivate. A happy and an enduring marriage is of gradual growth, and in the making of it there will be little tragedies that will teach us about ourselves. I believe

that we are most near to success in those moments when we seem to have failed, moments of anger, and of wounding; for if there is a rightness in us we may win more poignant wisdom from those moments than from months of facile pleasantness.

Perhaps you have seen pain and distress on the face of your mate, and the guilt is yours; and in that moment of comprehension, compassion and self-shame you do penance in the presence of your love. To wear the crown of thorns on occasions is to win to yourself wisdom.

The happy marriage is full of such wisdom, and over its gateway is written: "Walk gently, speak softly. The sinner is he who wounds."

WHAT IS AHEAD OF A

A question which is being asked in every real home in America; and a reply by the author of "Sorrell and Son"

WHEN one considers the effect of man's mobility upon his civilization, one is made to realize that the internal-combustion engine is the most potent and significant motive force of the day. In a sense it is the new Sphinx, an enigmatic and almost sinister creature, challenging man to read the riddle of the mechanical future.

Athens held her empire by the oars of her ships; Rome marched to power on the feet of her legionaries. The nomad's horse left older and richer civilizations trampled in the dust. The armor-clad knight gave place to the gunner and the musketeer. Columbus' sailing-ship became America. Steam conquered the wilderness.

All this is obvious to us now, but how unobvious it was to the young men of those earlier generations! Did some Byzantine boy dream of Constantinople falling to the Turk? Could any Spaniard or Dutchman have foreseen Buenos Aires or New York?

The future is to the young—the young mind, the young body; and if we say that in this age of ours the mechanic has displaced the mystic, and that the flying chariot of Apollo is driven by a petrol engine and not drawn by winged horses, we are at the beginning of our problem.

Life is self-expression; and each generation must express itself in its own way and in its own language.

Take that most delightful and subtle play "Berkeley Square," in which a young man of our age has a sentimental passion for the period of the Georges and the American Revolution. In the play his dream comes true. He gets back through time to his Georgian period, and is completely disillusioned. His cry is: "These people have their feet stuck in the mud." He sees the period as gross, unclean, barbarous and cruel. He feels himself in chains. Even the Georgian girl who loves him understands his predicament, perhaps because of her youth. A man has to live with his own generation.

In Noel Coward's operetta "Bitter Sweet," the same theme is dealt with, but in another atmosphere. Here the woman of the old culture, romantic, musical, who had loved splendidly, tragically, and married a penniless musician, finds in the new jazz cocktail crowd, a little horde of young aliens. And her cry is: "O you young things, you understand nothing but speed and noise."

Now, let us exclude steam and electricity, and take the gasoline engine as the significant, modern symbol. Steam—in a sense—gave movement in the mass. The gasoline engine has supplied what one might call individual mobility. Each man is his own motor.

We have had four phases of movement:

The Foot-and-Hoof Period.

The Bicycle Period.

The Automobile.

The Airplane.

I have passed through three of these periods, and shared in them, while refusing to accept the fourth, perhaps because the airplane still suggests to me the loathsome bombing-bird of the war—though I can remember watching one of the first airplane flights in France, and the ecstasy and exultation to which it stirred the crowd. I shared in that exultation. Man—the winged god—saluted us from the skies.

A reminiscent mood can be significant, especially when it is personal and human, and linked with human happenings. The



The old gods have passed.

foot-and-horse phase of transportation is associated with memories of my father, a busy country doctor. He walked and drove; he gave up riding because he found that it interfered with his delicacy of touch. His practice was a large one, and often I drove with him in the high dogcart in the teeth of a bitter northeast wind.

He kept three horses, one a very proud and strenuous mare who could do her forty miles, and would not tolerate a passing on the road. And nothing could pass her, if my father so pleased. In such a practice as this he might be twelve hours on the road, visiting outlying villages; and yet I have a feeling that he saw more than the

modern doctor sees. He had more time to observe things, crops, birds, trees, the sky and its moods. He had more leisure to be in touch with his environment. He loved poetry and could quote it while handling his reins. I cannot imagine a man at the wheel of a fast car quoting poetry—at least, not that sort of poetry.

Now, certainly in a sense, my father was less mobile than the modern doctor in his car, but I would back him against any man of his age in a race up three flights of stairs. He was extraordinarily active, both mentally and physically. Busy doctor that he was, he had time to be a justice of the peace, a good cricketer and a first-class shot. He had leisure—or he made it—for matters that were amazingly various. He kept immense notebooks. He read. He wrote poetry. He found time to teach himself German. He could hurry and yet remain inwardly at peace. He had a quiet, beautiful, tranquil temper, and strong views which today our tired tolerance would call narrow. As a Victorian he was very much master of his environment. On sundry occasions he gave me kindly, judicial whackings, and I deserved them. I find the balance and the rhythm and the human rightness of him rather rare today, for he combined the two qualities of the craftsman and the artist.

The pneumatic-tired bicycle arrived, and I was given one by my father. He never learned to ride a machine, though I tried to teach him during one summer holiday. I can remember him plunging into the bottom of a deep ditch, and all that was visible above the grass and weeds was the top of his cap. After that he left the machine alone, and being a man of his generation, was content to walk and to drive.

I suppose the bicycle supplied me with my first experience of speed, but in a very mild form. A rush downhill, or five minutes' scorching at twenty miles an hour, satisfied the occasion. The machine gave to us a new sense of adventure. There were strange roads to be explored and conquered, new country to be seen. Often in those days we rode out in parties to distant villages or places of interest, a ruin or a church, and had tea in some cottage garden. They were very gentle and unsensational expeditions, but we went in search of certain things, and we found them.

I can remember starting off on a fifty-mile ride with a Scotch student, and directly we had cleared the town, he said to me: "Now, what shall we argue about?" I was surprised. I was content to ride and look. "Why argue?" He answered: "I always like to get up an argument on a ride, and I like it to last the whole way. What about Free Will?" But I had never been an argumentative child, and I had no wish to wrangle on Free Will and Fatalism on a summer morning. Probably he thought me a dull dog, but we were young, and my youth challenged his, and I

YOUNG MAN TODAY ?

by Warwick Deeping

Decorations by George Illian

made the pace. Hard pedaling left him less talkative.

But consider the mentality of that Scotch student. He was mounted on a machine, but he was so much master of that machine that his urge was to talk metaphysics. He was a brain, a personality carried along on two wheels; but he still dominated the machine. It was a useful accessory. It had not so cramped his intelligence that it was a mere narrow slit no wider than the road along which some mechanical creature thundered.

Then came the automobile. I had married. My wife and I lived in the depths of the country. In those days she was a delicate child, unable to ride, and apt to be overtired by too much walking. I had a little money saved, and we bought our first car, a queer little contraption with a single cylinder, and sans hood or wind-screen. But what a car it was! We were like two excited babies in a glorified pram behind that little chugging engine. We went upon voyages of discovery, pilgrimages to strange places. We had a new mobility, a widened horizon. My wife has often said that nothing made so great a change in her life as that small car. It did what a machine should, saved her weariness, and allowed her spirit to travel as it has always traveled in quest of the thing she loves—beauty.

Those were peaceful days upon the road. There was no hurry, and no strained alertness. The machine might be temperamental, but it had not attained to too much strength and arrogance. Twenty-five miles an hour was fast. You could stop when and where you pleased, and sit and stare. You could be alone.

But now! We have two cars, each capable of doing sixty miles an hour, and a chauffeur. Compared to that little old vehicle they are things of luxury. As cars go, they have beauty; but I am quite sure that they never give us the pleasure we won from that glorified pram. Because the tradition of the road has changed. In the old days the road was for the wayfarer and for the beasts; now it is for the machine. It is not a pleasant highway leading to secret places, a track for the country folk; it is a concrete stage for speed.

Often I sit in a village or on the edge of a wood or heath, and marvel. Modernity rushes by. It fills the old quiet places with incessant and dreadful noise and mechanical unrest. Motor-coaches, cars, motor bicycles in endless streams, all hurrying. And to get where? To the sea, to some scheduled beauty spot, some public house? These pilgrimages are as mechanical as the machines in which they are made. Hustle is the thing. You must pass the other fellow. You must exhibit speed, and the little swagger of speed. Democracy is on the road, but not

socialism. The hundred-and-fifty-pound man wants to be as good or perhaps a little better than the thousand pounder.

The machine itself can be a snob.

One day I spoke to a Scotch gentleman who occupies a position of responsibility in the experimental gardens of our horticultural society. It is a place of great beauty and interest, alive with the most fascinating forms of life.

I said: "Isn't it extraordinary—all those people tearing down the main road in their machines, and hardly a soul stops to visit this garden?"

He looked at me and said in his dry Scotch way:

"Per-haps it's as weel."

Now, here we have it: speed, youth at the wheel, the crowd complex in a car, thousands of cars. It is here, dominant, a reality. What does it signify? What is it going to do with us, or we with it? What is youth going to do with it, or what is it going to do to youth?

Pregnant questions. Is the young wireless fan going to spend his life listening to music that some other man has made? Is he going to make no music of his own? Is he to be nothing but a copyist, a listener-in, a mere mechanized intelligence controlling automatically an automaton created largely by machinery? Is he to be shot about the earth and across the skies like a mere nerve ganglion in the hollow of a steel shell?

Courage. Yes, the age shows courage. I know that courage is required to drive a fast car in a road race or to handle a super-plane. I respect this courage and admire it. But cannot this courage come to possess a shell of insensitiveness? It takes on the callousness of the machine. It can kill and drive on and leave a little bloody mess in the road. This happens almost daily in our civilized countries. The speed maniac kills and slinks swiftly and treacherously away.

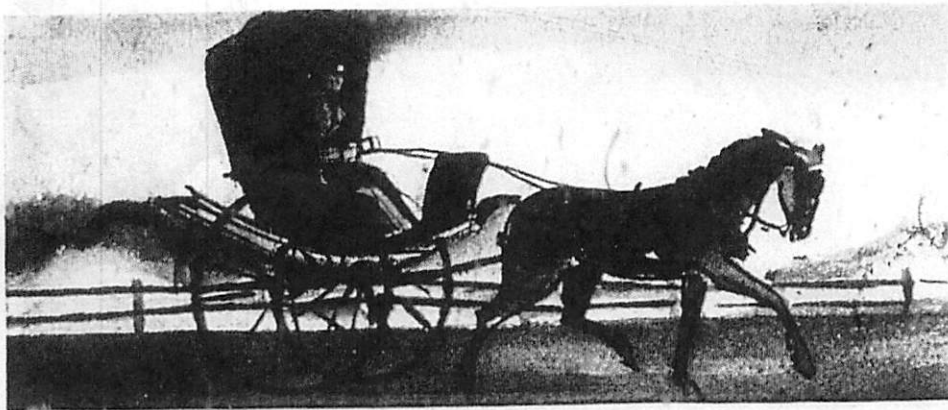
Up above us is the airplane, man's very last symbol, his mechanical bird, wonderful and splendid, and yet how utterly inferior when compared with a bird! Man is still but a clumsy butcher when his work is set beside that of the Unknown Artist. Rather would I regard the airplane as a promise of what may be, a beautiful and silent moth, not a horror of noise.

And now, what of Youth and the Machine? Youth is the rebel; it protests; it asks for the new, for the expression of its very self in its own generation; and never has youth been more rebel than now. Never has there been a greater breaking away from the past and its traditions. Youth cries: "I come, I see, I conquer."

Was there ever such an age, such possibilities? We



Youth will cry, "Let me possess my soul in silence."



*Often I drove with
him in the teeth
of a bitter wind.*

have got rid of so much humbug, so much snobbery, so many silly illusions. The eyes of our young men are open very wide. They are young realists, pragmatists. They question everything. "Will it work? Can it travel?"

Modern youth demands results. Its self-expression seems to be in movement, and especially in rapid movement. It is objective rather than subjective. Its hero is the speed-king, the games expert, the man of big business, the super-mechanic. And to a point all this is immensely healthy. It demands courage and fitness and self-control. It is of the open air. It does not smell of the cabaret and the brothel.

Modern youth at its best strikes me as very clean, and with a wisdom of its own. It is much less sex-obsessed. It is more mature, but sometimes it appears pathetically disillusioned. We youngsters of thirty years ago could be romantic creatures, and I often wonder whether modern youth falls in love as we did, not only with women but with life. For to fall in love with life and to remain in love with it, a man must have the soul of the artist.

What does one mean by artist? Not a long-haired person, the creature of a clique, the exponent of some particular form of expressionism. The artist as I see him retains the aliveness, the sensitiveness, the curiosity of the child. He has a feeling for the mystery of things. He may be a scientist, or a gardener or a doctor or a shepherd on the downs, or a painter of pictures. He is not satisfied with one aspect of life, mere movement in a straight line. He is sensitive to all sorts of impressions, to the thing we call beauty. He has a sense of the unknown, even in himself. He is the inspired humanist, something much more than a mechanic or a mathematician, though the inspired mathematician can be the greatest of artists.

Let us take these two types, the mechanic and the artist, and for the sake of our argument contrast them vividly; for it is this contrast that challenges the youth of today. Are we to be machine men, the creatures of speed and of the cinema and the sensational press, growing as alike as the cars upon the road? Or shall we rebel against a mass production culture, and choose to color it with some of the blood of the old immortals? Shall we be mechanical men or the children of Christ?

Though may I say that I regard Henry Ford as one of the world's liberators? He has pointed a particular way. I prefer to think of Ford not so much as the maker of a machine as the preacher of "service." He has given man a machine, but also he has given him a message.

For my feeling about the problem is that the young man today has his own riddle of the Sphinx, and that is how to combine the artist and the mechanic. And the artist will have to master the mechanic. Unless this happens, all our mobility and hurry and hustle will see us nothing but mechanized slaves. Youth must cry: "I will possess my soul." For in spite of the psychologists, we all of us understand what we mean by soul. The behaviorist may argue against the existence of this invisible personality, like a child who may argue that there is no jam, because he has just eaten it.

One asks the question, "Is there any figure of the age that symbolizes the mingling of the artist and the mechanic?" and into one's field of mental vision rises the figure of Lindbergh. And what a figure! There is something of the Bayard in it, of Columbus, of Ulysses. It is winged youth, splendid and brave and chivalrous. It is no mere accessory attached to the machine. We think of Lindbergh the man, flying, not of the machine. I have

never seen Lindbergh in the flesh, but I have seen him in films, and I loved him. He was so unlike the screen man, or the crowd man. His modesty, his naturalness, got me. This big, brave, yet humorous boy, putting up with all the sensationalism, suffering it, and probably wanting to go to bed! Lindbergh flies with an inspiration. He is youth pointing to the sky, but he points like a poet or an explorer, not like a mechanic.

For it is the spirit in which a man does a thing that matters. The coat of mail went to the Crusades, but it went because the man inside the coat of mail was moved to express an idea. There was something sacred to be fought for and recovered. Lindbergh would have understood the crusaders. He would have been beside Richard the Lion or Louis the Saint. But today our peril is that nothing is sacred to the machine, and to the machine mind of the mechanic. Some of us went to the Great War like crusaders, only to find that nothing was sacred to the shell and the bomb. Had women and children to be blown to pieces? They were blown to pieces. The man-slave behind the gun did not hesitate.

And men got used to it. They accepted the horror. Even while mouthing sensational sayings, they grew strangely callous. There was so much killing that killing seemed natural. So it is with the machine. There is so much machine in life that whole masses of humanity are becoming insensitive to the reactions the machine cult has on them.

We cry: "All this is splendid. Man is being saved from shameful toil. His horizon is the whole earth. He can fly to the North Pole. He can sit and listen to a battle in China. Man is becoming a little god. In due course the machine will do everything for him, even dress him and shave him in the morning. The scientists will produce further wonders. We shall live on synthetic food. Perhaps we shall cease to die."

Quite so. But there is the old saying of the man who came to possess the whole earth and who lost his own soul. Are we to have the soul of a machine as our god and tyrant, or the soul of man? The trouble will be that we may fail to realize that we are the bloated little slaves of the machine. Masses of men fail to realize it now.

That is youth's problem as I see it. Youth may cry: "I will travel at five hundred miles an hour. I will visit the moon. I will make just-so much money." And then? Yes, that will depend on the spirit in which he does it, as a Lindbergh, or as some poor little purblind cad rushing along a concrete track from nowhere to nowhere. What will the moon be when he reaches it, if he takes to the moon nothing but a self that is a small jelly of intelligence cased in a thing of steel?

The great humanists were wiser. Were Christ faced with this



modern problem, one can hear Him saying: "Render unto the machine that which is the machine's, and unto man that which is man's." Let us realize that our mechanical creations are for service, and not for mere sensationalism. Let us get through with the craze of mere speed for speed's sake, and realize that the latest mechanical marvel may be just a gramophone—playing what? Schubert's songs. And what would that machine be worth without Schubert? All honor to the men who discover and create. They too are artists. It is we who lose the artist in the mechanical toy.

But already I see signs of a reaction. In Germany after the war youth walked; it walked—young men and girls together into the country; I hear that they still walk. I have just been staying in an English country inn, and while the motoring crowd made the village street hideous all day and most of the night, I thought: "How silly all this is!" And apparently there were young people who thought and felt as I did. They came to the inn, quite a number of them in shorts and skirts, and carrying packs. They were walking. They had gone back to their good feet, and to places where the machine was not wholly a marauding monster, the new Peter Pans come to play with the Indians and the Pirates of a young fancy. Yes, and more than that. Youth was rediscovering the quality of life that appeals to youth with a strange sweet poignancy, beauty.

The artist is there, the child reaching out its hands to the sunlight on old trees.

I have a young friend to whom I offered a motor-bicycle. It was a lapse on my part. He told me quite frankly and simply that he was not interested in motor-bicycles. He would not tell me what he wanted, but an aunt of his did.

"If you want to give Bill something, give him a typewriter."

I gave Bill a typewriter. Again—the machine. But to this lad it was a machine to be kept in proper subordination, and in right relation to his craft. He wrote. The machine was to serve his craft.

Later I asked him: "Bill, do you compose on the machine?"

No, he did not do that. He kept the spirit of his craft apart from those clicking levers. He wrote, and only when the poem or tale was finished was the machine allowed to play its part.

Later I discovered that he had a passion for flowers. He was taking charge of the flower garden at his home.

Now, this lad is not a mawkish sentimentalist or a little literary person. He does not belong to the Oscar Wilde period and the cult of the Green Carnation. He is modern youth at its best, frank, wide-eyed, virile, a player of games, strangely wise in its way, sweetly human. And I see much youth like this, clean and eager and urgent, and I think at its best it is better than the best of my day.

That is the problem. I would have the young man of today choose as Bill chose—the spirit rather than steel, the artist's craft rather than the mere machine.

Youth will have to make this choice. If this generation cannot rise to it, a later generation will. It is inevitable; it lies at the back of the soul of man, behind the heritage of ages, in his instincts, in his urges. It is there, embryonic, in the womb of consciousness.

For of what shall we be conscious? Of the multitudinous explosions of the petrol engine, of the roar of the plane, of the discords of the bitter streets, of the din of the workshop, the blare of the loud-speaker, the yelling headlines of the press? Is this to be our fate? Is our consciousness to be chained in a world like a

boiler factory or a mill, where metal clangs and machinery swirls? Youth will rebel. It will cry: "Let me possess my soul in silence. Let me see the hills and smell the sea. Let the machine take me just so far and no farther, to the edge of that world where my spirit can play and sing. Let it be me that leaps into the foam or soars among the clouds. Let the machine be my servant, and money my slave."

This will happen. It will happen soon; or it will happen later. It is the great happening that is ahead of the youth of today. And how splendid it can be! We are so much at the beginning of things. Also we are so much at the end of them unless we recover beautiful humanism. We have got to get our heads out of the jaws of the steel idol. Inevitably so.

Let youth see to it.

For I am both old and young. I have played with the machine, and I have come back to my garden. There are other perfumes than those of petrol and burnt oil. Yes, far subtler and more exquisite and lasting perfumes. There are other things to see than the white glare of the road as it rushes under the wheels. We may hasten and get nowhere. We may rush hither and thither and be blind. I can foresee an age of stillness, and the youth of that age will look back upon this period of noise and confusion, of sensational shoutings and posturing pragmatism, and say with wonder and compassion: "What fool savages those people were! And yet they taught us things, how not to do certain things. They had too many new toys, and did not know how to play with them properly."

If the young man of today will dare to dream and to differ, this world can be a world of new splendor, new freedom. We may have to go out into the desert and fast in order to find our new God. The old gods have passed, and we have been tempted to make a god of our new cleverness. But only when we are artists do we begin to understand the soul of the Unknown Artist, and that is life.

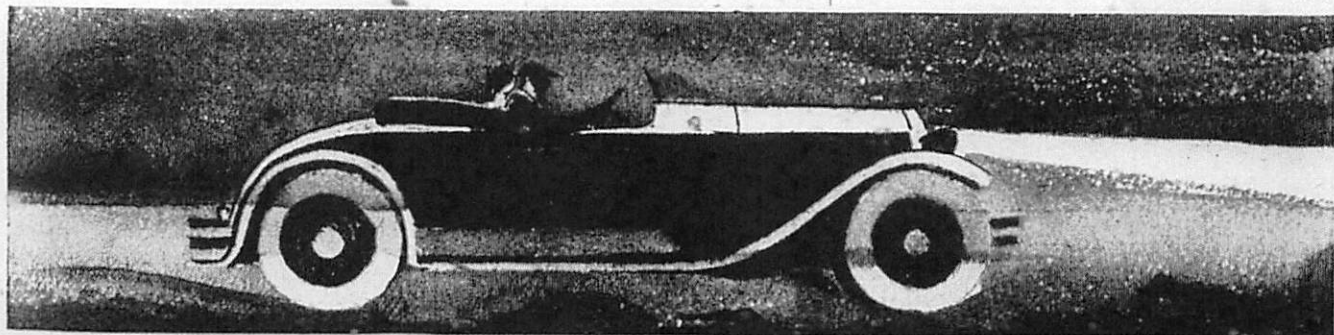
Life is not rushing hither and thither. We did away with many of the old illusions, but our youth of tomorrow will have other illusions to shatter. The dogma of equality may be dying. We believe that life has climbed up variations, and a new generation will dare to vary and to differ. We shall have to rid ourselves of a kind of dreadful crowd-complacency, of a noisy and shallow conceit.

Man is a social creature, but he is not a pea in a pod. We have our fashions in sociology. Sometimes it is the individual, sometimes the mass that is cherished; but mere mass goes nowhere. The great humanists have always appealed to the secret, striving soul of man. Never have they preached to a field of cabbages, and assumed man to be one among many cabbages.

Youth today has its choice. Will it mistake mere movement for life, mere speed for progress? Will it fly like Lindbergh on an inspired pilgrimage of its own, or will it merely rush blindly hither and thither, under the illusion that it is accomplishing something?

Will the young man of today be content to be a half-skilled "hand" in a mechanized world, or will he choose to be the artist, the creative, dreaming, happy rebel? Only by dreaming new dreams until he dreams them into reality will he escape from the crowd. Or rather—he will transfigure the crowd, for we men must live together.

The problem is: "How shall we live?" Like one of H. G. Wells' human automata, like robots, or like men who somehow believe that the Unknown Artist watches us and smiles?



Rushing along a concrete track from nowhere to nowhere.

What Is Ahead of Youth?

Condensed from *The Red Book* (December, '29)

Warwick Deeping

(See note on inside back cover)

LIFE is self-expression; and each generation must express itself in its own way and in its own language.

A reminiscent mood can be significant. My father, a busy country doctor, kept three horses and was often twelve hours on the road, visiting outlying villages. I have a feeling that he saw more than the modern doctor sees. He had more time to observe things, crops, birds, trees, the sky and its moods. He loved poetry and could quote it while handling the reins. I cannot imagine a man at the wheel of a fast car quoting poetry.

Busy man that he was, he had time to be a justice of the peace, a good cricketer and a first-class shot. He had leisure—or he made it—for matters that were amazingly various. He kept immense notebooks. He read. He wrote poetry. He found time to teach himself German. He could hurry and yet remain inwardly at peace. He combined the two qualities of the craftsman and the artist.

I can remember, back in the Bicycle Period, starting off on a 50-mile ride with a Scotch student, and directly we had cleared the town, he said to me: "Now,

what shall we argue about?" I was surprised. I was content to ride and look. "Why argue?" He answered: "I always like to get up an argument on a ride, and I like it to last the whole way. What about Free Will?"

Consider the mentality of that Scotch student. He was mounted on a machine, but he was so much master of that machine that his urge was to talk metaphysics. He was a brain, a personality carried along on two wheels; but he still dominated the machine. It was a useful accessory. It had not so cramped his intelligence that it was a mere narrow slit no wider than the road along which some mechanical creature thundered.

Then came the automobile. . . . Often I sit in a village or on the edge of a wood or heath, and marvel. Modernity rushes by. It fills the old quiet places with incessant and dreadful noise and mechanical unrest. Hustle is the thing. You must pass the other fellow. You must exhibit the swagger of speed.

Modern youth finds its self-expression in movement, and especially in rapid movement. It is objective rather than subjective.

WHAT IS AHEAD OF YOUTH?

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Its hero is the speed-king, the games expert, the man of big business, the super-mechanic. And to a point all this is immensely healthy. It demands courage and fitness and self-control. It is of the open air. It does not smell of the cabaret and the brothel. Modern youth at its best strikes me as very clean. It is much less sex-obsessed. It is more mature, yet sometimes it appears pathetically disillusioned. We youngsters of 30 years ago could be romantic creatures, and I often wonder whether modern youth falls in love as we did, not only with women but with life. For to fall in love with life and to remain in love with it, a man must have the soul of the artist.

I do not mean a long-haired artist. The artist as I see him retains the aliveness, the sensitiveness, the curiosity of the child. He has a feeling for the mystery of things. He may be a scientist, a gardener, a doctor, or a painter of pictures. He is sensitive to all sorts of impressions, to the thing we call beauty.

It is this contrast between the mechanic and the artist that challenges the youth of today. Are we to be machine men, the creatures of speed and of the cinema and the sensational press, growing as alike as the cars upon the road? Or shall we rebel against a mass production culture?

The young man's problem to-

day is how to combine the artist and the mechanic. The artist will have to master the mechanic. Unless this happens, all our mobility and hurry and hustle will see us nothing but mechanized slaves. Youth must cry: "I will possess my soul."

Lindbergh is one figure of the age that symbolizes the mingling of the artist and the mechanic. And what a figure! It is winged youth, splendid and brave and chivalrous. It is no mere accessory to the machine. Lindbergh is youth pointing to the sky, but he points like a poet or an explorer, not like a mechanic. It is the spirit in which a man does a thing that matters.

During the War men grew strangely callous. There was so much killing that killing seemed natural. So it is with the machine. There is so much machine in life that whole masses of humanity are becoming insensitive to the reactions the machine cult has on them.

We cry: "All this is splendid. Man is being saved from shameful toil. His horizon is the whole earth. He can fly to the North Pole. He can sit and listen to a battle in China. Man is becoming a little god. In due course the machine will do everything for him, even dress him and shave him in the morning. The scientists will produce further wonders. We shall live on synthetic foods.

45

Perhaps we shall cease to die."

Quite so. But there is the old saying of the man who came to possess the whole earth and who lost his own soul. Are we to have the soul of a machine as our god and tyrant, or the soul of man? The trouble will be that we may fail to realize that we are the bloated little slaves of the machine. Masses of men fail to realize it now.

Youth, in this generation or in a later one, will rebel. It will cry: "Let me possess my soul in silence. Let me see the hills and smell the sea. Let the machine take me just so far and no farther, to the edge of that world where my spirit can play and sing. Let it be me that leaps into the foam or soars among the clouds. Let the machine be my servant, and money my slave."

This will happen. It will happen soon; or it will happen later. It is the great happening that is ahead of the youth of today. And how splendid it can be! We are so much at the beginning of things.

I have played with the machine, and I have come back to my garden. There are other perfumes than those of petrol and burnt oil. There are other things to see than the white glare of the road as it rushes under the wheels. We may rush hither and thither and be blind. I can foresee an age of stillness, and the youth

of that age will look back upon this period of noise and confusion and say with wonder and compassion: "What fool savages those peoples were! They had too many new toys, and did not know how to play with them properly."

If the young man of today will dare to dream and to differ, this world can be a world of new splendor, new freedom. We may have to go out into the desert and fast in order to find our new God. The old gods have passed, and we have been tempted to make a god of our new cleverness. But only when we are artists do we begin to understand the soul of the Unknown Artist, and that is life.

Youth today has its choice. Will it mistake mere movement for life, mere speed for progress? Will the young man of today be content to be a half-skilled "hand" in a mechanized world, or will he choose to be the artist, the creative, dreaming, happy rebel? Only by dreaming new dreams until he dreams them into reality will he escape from the crowd. Or rather — he will transfigure the crowd, for we men must live together.

The problem is: "How shall we live?" Like one of H. G. Wells' human automata, like robots, or like men who somehow believe that the Unknown Artist watches us and smiles?



What is ahead of

WHEN one considers the effect of man's mobility upon his civilisation one is made to realise that the internal combustion engine is the most potent and significant motive force of the day. In a sense it is the new Sphinx, an enigmatic and almost sinister creature, challenging man to read the riddle of the mechanical future.

Athens held her empire by the oars of her ships; Rome marched to power on the feet of her legionaries. The nomad's horse left older and richer civilisations trampled in the dust. The armour-clad knight gave place to the gunner and the musketeer. Columbus's sailing ship became America. Steam conquered the wilderness.

All this is obvious to us now, but how unobvious it was to the young men of those earlier generations! Did some Byzantine boy dream of Constantinople falling to the Turk? Could any Spaniard or Dutchman have foreseen Buenos Aires or New York?

THE future is to the young, the young mind, the young body, and if we say that in this age of ours the mechanic has displaced the mystic, and that the flying chariot of Apollo is driven by a petrol engine and not drawn by winged horses, we are at the beginning of our problem.

Life is self-expression, and each generation must express itself in its own way, and in its own language.

Take that most delightful and subtle

play, "Berkeley Square," in which a young man of our age has a sentimental passion for the period of the Georges and the American Revolution. In the play his dream comes true. He gets back through time to his Georgian period, and is completely disillusioned. His cry is "These people have their feet stuck in the mud." He sees the period as gross, unclean, barbarous and cruel. He feels himself in chains. Even the Georgian girl who loves him understands his predicament perhaps because of her youth. A man has to live with his own generation.

In Noel Coward's operetta, "Bitter Sweet," the same theme is dealt with, but in another atmosphere. Here the woman of the old culture, romantic, musical, who had loved splendidly, tragically, and married a penniless musician, finds in the new jazzing cocktail crowd a little horde of young aliens. And her cry is "Ah, you young things, you understand nothing but speed and noise."

Now let us exclude steam and electricity, and take the petrol engine as the significant, modern symbol. Steam—in a sense—gave movement in the mass. The petrol engine has supplied what one might call individual mobility. Each man is his own motor.

We have had four phases of movement:

The Foot and Hoof Period.

The Bicycle Period.

The Automobile.

The Aeroplane.

I have passed through three of these

periods, and shared in them, was refusing to accept the fourth, perhaps, because the aeroplane still suggests to me the loathsome bombing bird of the war. Though I can remember watching one of the first aeroplane flights in France, and the ecstasy and exultation to which it stirred the crowd. I shared in that exultation. Man—the winged god—saluted us from the skies.

A REMINISCENT mood can be significant, especially when it is personal and human, and linked with human experience. The foot and horse phase of transportation is associated with memories of my father, a busy country doctor. He walked and drove; he gave up riding because he found that it interfered with his delicacy of touch. His practice was a large one, and often I drove with him in the big dogcart in the teeth of a bitter north-east wind. He kept three horses, one a very proud and strenuous mare who could do her forty miles, and would not tolerate a passing on the road. And nothing could pass her, if my father so pleased. In such a practice as this he might be twelve hours on the road, visiting outlying villages, and yet I have a feeling that he saw more than the modern doctor does. He had more time to observe the crops, birds, trees, the sky and the moods. He had more leisure to be in touch with his environment. He loved poetry and could quote it while handling the reins. I cannot imagine a man at the wheel of a fast car quoting poetry—at least, not that sort of poetry.

Now, certainly, in a sense, my father was less mobile than the modern doctor in his car, but I would back him against any man of his age in a race up three flights of stairs. He was extraordinarily active, both mentally and physically.

a Young Man today!

By

Warwick DEEPING

Speed, hustle, noise, the crowd complex in a thousand cars, mass-produced culture. . . . Youth must choose between the soul of the machine and of Man. The artist, alive to the mystery of things, sensitive to beauty, challenges the mechanic. He alone understands the Unknown Artist that is Life

and conquered, new country to be seen. Often in those days we rode out in parties to distant villages or places of interest, a ruin or a church, and had tea in some cottage garden. They were very gentle and unsensational expeditions, but we went

in search of certain things and we found them.

I can remember starting off on a fifty-mile ride with a Scotch student, and

directly we had cleared the town he said to me: "Now, what shall we argue about?" I was surprised. I was content to ride and look. "Why argue?" He answered: "I always like to get up an argument on a ride, and I like it to last the whole way. What about Free Will?" But I have never been an argumentative child, and I had no wish to wrangle on Free Will and Fatalism on a summer morning. Probably he thought me a dull dog, but we were young, and my youth challenged his, and I made the pace. Hard pedalling left him less talkative.

But consider the mentality of that Scotch student. He was mounted on a machine, but he was so much master of that machine that his urge was to talk metaphysics. He was a brain: a personality carried along on two wheels, but he still dominated the machine. It was a useful accessory. It had not so cramped his intelligence that it was a mere narrow slit, no wider than the road along which some mechanical creature thundered.

THEN came the automobile. I had married. My wife and I lived in the depths of the country. In those days she was a delicate child, unable to

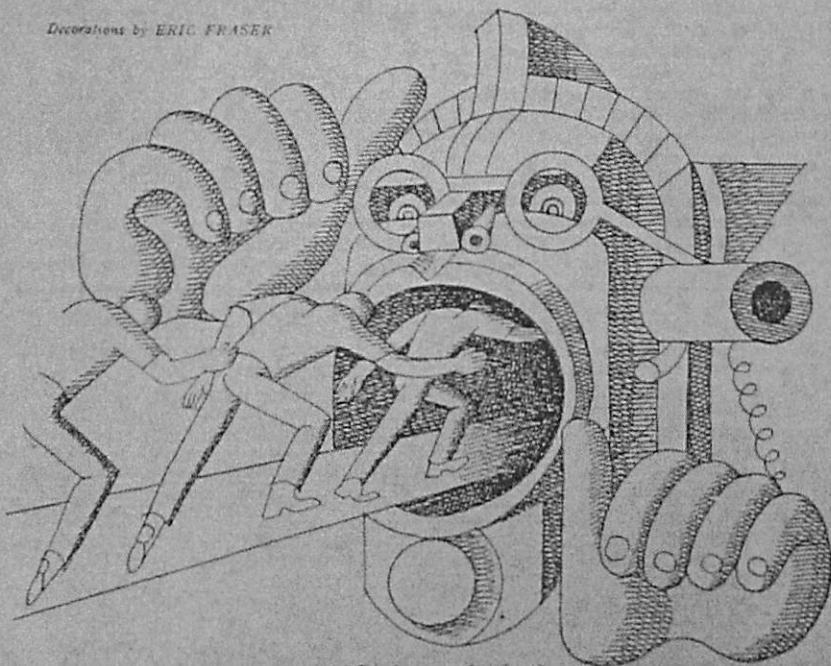
(Continued on page 196)

Busy doctor that he was, he had time to be a justice of the peace, a good cricketer and a first-class shot. He had leisure—or he made it—for matters that were amazingly various. He kept immense notebooks. He read. He wrote poetry. He found time to teach himself German. He could hurry and yet remain inwardly at peace. He had a quite beautiful, tranquil temper, and strong views which to-day our tired tolerance would call narrow. As a Victorian he was very much master of his environment. On sundry occasions he gave me kindly, judicial whackings, and I deserved them. I find the balance and the rhythm and the human rightness of him rather rare to-day, for he combined the two qualities of the craftsman and the artist.

THE pneumatic-tired bicycle arrived, and I was given one by my father. He never learnt to ride a machine, though I tried to teach him during one summer holiday. I can remember him plunging into the bottom of a deep ditch, and all that was visible above the grass and weeds was the top of his cap. After that he left the machine alone, and, being a man of his generation, was content to walk and to drive.

I suppose the bicycle supplied me with my first experience of speed, but in a very mild form. A rush down hill, or five minutes' scorching at twenty miles an hour, satisfied the occasion. The machine gave to me a new sense of adventure. There were strange roads to be explored

Decorations by ERIC FRASER



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What is ahead of a Young Man Today?

By WARWICK DEEPING: (Continued from page 99)

ride and apt to be overtired by too much walking. I had a little money saved, and we bought our first car, a queer little contraption with a single cylinder, and sans hood or windscreen. But what a car it was! We were like two excited babies in a glorified pram behind that little chugging engine. We went upon voyages of discovery, pilgrimages to strange places. We had a new mobility, a widened horizon. My wife has often said that nothing made so great a change in her life as that small car. It did what a machine should: saved her weariness, and allowed her spirit to travel as it has always travelled in quest of the thing she loves—beauty.

Those were peaceful days upon the road. There was no hurry, and no strained alertness. The machine might be temperamental, but it had not attained to too much strength and arrogance. Twenty-five miles an hour was fast. You could stop when and where you pleased, and sit and stare. You could be alone.

But now! We have two cars, each capable of doing sixty miles an hour, and a chauffeur. Compared to that little old vehicle they are things of luxury. As cars go, they have beauty, but I am quite sure that they never give us the pleasure we won from that glorified pram. Because the tradition of the road has changed. In the old days the road was for the wayfarer and for the beasts; now it is for the machine. It is not a pleasant highway leading to secret places, a track for the country folk; it is a concrete stage for speed.

Often I sit in a village or on the edge of a wood or heath, and marvel. Modernity rushes by. It fills the old quiet places with incessant and dreadful noise and mechanical unrest. Motor coaches, cars, motor bicycles in endless streams, all hurrying. And to get where? To the sea, to some scheduled beauty spot, some public house? These pilgrimages are as mechanical as the machines in which they are made. Hustle is the thing. You must pass the other fellow. You must exhibit speed, and the little swagger of speed. Democracy is on the road, but not socialism. The hundred and fifty pound man wants to be as good or a little better than the thousand pounder. The machine can be a snob.

ONE day I spoke to a Scotch gentleman who occupies a position of responsibility in the experimental garden of our horticultural society. It is a place of great beauty and interest, alive with the most fascinating forms of life.

I said: "Isn't it extraordinary?—all these people tearing down the main road in their machines, and hardly a soul stops to visit this garden!"

He looked at me and said in his dry Scotch way: "Per-haps it's as weel."

Now, here we have it—speed, youth at the wheel, the crowd complex in a car, thousands of cars. It is here, dominant, a reality. What does it signify? What is it going to do with us, or we with it? What is youth going to do with it, or what is it going to do to youth?

Pregnant questions. Is the young

wireless fan going to spend his life listening to music, that some other man has made, is he going to make no music of his own? Is he to be nothing but a copyist, a listener-in, a mere mechanical intelligence controlling automatically an automaton created largely by machinery? Is he to be shot about the earth and across the skies like a mere nerve ganglion in the hollow of a steel shell?

COURAGE? Yes, the age shows courage. I know that courage is required to drive a fast car in a road race, or to handle a super-plane. I respect this courage and admire it. But cannot this courage come to possess a shell of insensitiveness? It takes on the callousness of the machine. It can kill and drive on and leave a little bloody mess in the road. This happens almost daily in our civilised countries. The speed mania kills and slinks swiftly and treacherously away.

Up above us is the aeroplane, man's very last symbol, his mechanical bird, wonderful and splendid, and yet how utterly inferior when compared with a bird! Man is still but a clumsy botcher when his work is set beside that of the Unknown Artist. Rather would I regard the aeroplane as a promise of what may be, a beautiful and silent moth, not a horror of noise.

And now, what of Youth and the Machine? Youth is the rebel; it protests; it asks for the new, for the expression of its very self in its own generation, and never has youth been more rebel than now. Never has there been a greater breaking away from the past and its traditions. Youth cries: "I come, I see, I conquer."

Was there ever such an age, such possibilities? We have got rid of so much humbug, so much snobbery, so many silly illusions. The eyes of our young men are open very wide. They are young realists, pragmatists. They question everything. "Will it work? Can it travel?"

Modern youth demands results. Its self-expression seems to lie in movement, and especially in rapid movement. It is objective rather than subjective. Its hero is the speed-king, the games expert, the man of big business, the super-mechanic. And to a point all this is immensely healthy. It demands courage and fitness and self-control. It is of the open air. It does not smell of the cabaret and the brothel.

Modern youth at its best strikes me as very clean, and with a wisdom of its own. It is much less sex-obsessed. It is more mature, but sometimes it appears pathetically disillusioned. We youngsters of thirty years ago could be romantic creatures, and I often wonder whether modern youth falls in love as we did, not only with woman, but with life. For to fall in love with life and to remain in love with it a man must have the soul of the artist.

What does one mean by artist? Not a long-haired person, the creature of a clique, the exponent of some particular form of expressionism. The artist as I see him retains the aliveness, the sensitiveness, the curiosity of the child. He

MARRIAGE UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

THE ADVENTURE—AND AFTERWARDS.

By Warwick Deeping.

The well-known novelist; author of "Love among the Ruins," "The Prophetic Marriage," "Orchards," etc., etc.

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One of the great problems behind marriage is the problem of our age-old instincts which are often in conflict with the spirit of the social sacrament that we humans have created. Primitive man is as near to us as our grandfather, so near that the Victorians tried to shut him up in a cupboard or to treat him as a disreputable relation whom it was our respectable business to ignore.

Man is naturally polygamous. Woman—the normal child-bearing woman—is almost wholly monogamous. Hence an eternal tendency towards disharmony, glossed over as we will.

To man, passionate love is an adventure, and in the attempt to conventionalise the adventure and to stabilise its results we are accustomed to assume that the adventure ends when our hero and heroine pass through the gateway of marriage. But, for the man, it does not end there. In due course the full of his blood will be to other adventures, and though he may follow them or he may not, the call will come.

How were we Anglo-Saxons taught to approach marriage?

Were we not given to understand that it was the final sacrament, the great climax of our youth? It was to be unique, all-satisfying, permanent. And so it may be. But why were we never told that the labour and anguish and sweet joy of making it to come afterwards?

Take a normal case.

The man and the girl are in love. He sees life before him as a long tenderness, a dear loyalty. He does not think of himself as ever loving another woman. The adventure culminates, though the man may not realise that it is little more than an adventure. They marry. And then? How often a reaction, a sense of disillusionment following the natural melting of the mere sex glamour. The man may be shocked at himself, much troubled. He wonders whether he has made a mistake. The adventure is over, and with it passes that sense of

riding out into the dawn through mysterious forests and over unknown hills. The mere adventure is over; marriage has begun.

What may happen?

Many things. Do we not see the results around us?

If there is a disillusionment, rebellion, is it not because we are not taught to foresee realities which are more beautiful than any illusions? We muddle along, we compromise. The man has his work, the woman has her home, and perhaps—children.

Children are both a danger and a help. They may divide husband and wife instead of uniting them. I am bound to say that the happiest marriages I have observed have been the childless ones.

Take the ordinary compromise when the adventure is over. The danger moment comes when the man feels the call to his second adventure. It will come to most men, and compromise is a poor girdle of chastity. Fear of the conventions, a sense of sportsmanship, hard work, his children, may prevent him from following the adventure, but his instinct is to follow it, and a baffled instinct means repression. Repression may be both good and bad. And for the woman it may mean disharmony, humiliation, a sense of insecurity, spiritual neglect, and loneliness.

The French idea may be more material—but there is some wisdom in it. Adventure first, the business of marriage afterwards.

For marriage is a business, a craft, an art, and much more than that. We go into a building to be married, but how many of us realise that when we pass out of it we should begin the building of the house of marriage? False foundations crumble. Either we sit and stare at an imagined disillusionment, or, if we have been wisely warned, we have builded differently, or set about the rebuilding.

Men will toil, and plot and contrive to make

their particular business a success; they will sweat at the money-machine or over a game, but how many men work to make marriage a success? Will they not spend more time and thought over the handling of a golf club?

"O—marriage!" It is supposed to succeed of itself, to grow like a plant, a plant that may be left unwatered in a window. In nine cases out of ten it doesn't. Why should it? No man ever wrote book or painted a great picture with no more attention to the task than that which he gives to his morning shave. And marriage is the greatest of books and the finest of pictures. In the same way a woman may spend endless energy over her dress; surely it is worth while to dress such a complex thing as marriage with happy and delicate success.

For marriage, the happy marriage built upon the spirit of comradeship, restraint, tenderness, understanding, the consciousness of sunlight and shadow shared together, is the ideal human relationship. It lasts. It works. But the man and the woman must realise that the most permanent part of it has to be built when the dream castle of the sex adventure has vanished.

All this is as old as the hills, but when living in sight of the hills we have a way of forgetting them, or of growing so used to them that for us they cease to exist.

Some of us, perhaps, are unconscious builders of the house of marriage. Like the beaver we have the happy rightness of doing almost instinctively what has to be done. But I think—not many.

Let someone write a text-book on "The Architecture of Marriage" for those who are houseless and in Queen-street after that adventurous episode which culminates in a fortnight's sojourn in Switzerland or at some seaside hotel!

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Sept 1927 Tasmania Australian

A PLAIN TALK.

We are in too much of a hurry to see or to hear. In our haste we do not stop to understand, or even to wonder, why men and women utter cries of bitterness and anger. We are made irritable by haste. We are like people walking a little faster than is pleasant. We feel ragged and strained. But the trouble with is inward. We have allowed modern life to hustle us. We have allowed physical haste so to act upon the mental part of us that our minds are dragged into the same flurried trot. We have lost inward rhythm. Need it be so ? Suppose that, instead of making good resolutions we were to tranquilise the rhythm of our living ? Suppose we were to say to ourselves — I will not be in too much of a hurry. I will not rush past life like a runaway horse in blinkers. I will have time to watch my child play. I will have time to listen to the other fellow when he has something in his soul. I will have time to try to understand. I will not be in a hurry to say the bitter and the shallow and the cynical thing because my own inward haste has made me irritable and weary. I will stand still sometimes and possess my soul in peace.

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BODY RECOVER YESTERDAY.

Fatal Fishing Tr

DRAGGING operations at Squeaking Point, Port Sorell, yesterday, were responsible for the recovery of the body of Mr. J. Murphy, of Harford, who drowned on Saturday.

Mr. Murphy went out to his boat in a dinghy on Saturday, but he did not return, his friends being anxious.

An inspection was made of the boat and his hat, coat, pipe and matches were found. It was found that Murphy had trimmed a

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overboard, and, being unable to swim, had been drowned.

Dragging operations were commenced, but no trace of the missing man could be found on Monday. Operations were resumed yesterday, and the body was recovered from a deep pool some two chains from where the boat sank.

Squeaking Point is six miles from Harford, on the Devonport side of Port Sorell. In parts, the water is shallow, but in others the bottom is suddenly, the water being very deep. A strong current runs, and would have been practically impossible to grip, seeing he could not swim.

Much sympathy has been expressed for those that are left behind, being a wife and five small children. The deceased was only in his thirties.

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—Warwick Deeping.

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A PLAIN TALK.

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I. - Warwick Deeping.

HEARD THIS- ONE ?

It's a big rifle," the American explained, "and simply was a failure. All you do is to drive the bullet through a hole in the machine, and five minutes later you have the machine."

"What becomes of the bullet?" queried the Britisher.

"The bullet," was the answer, "falls out of another part of the machine in pieces, along or

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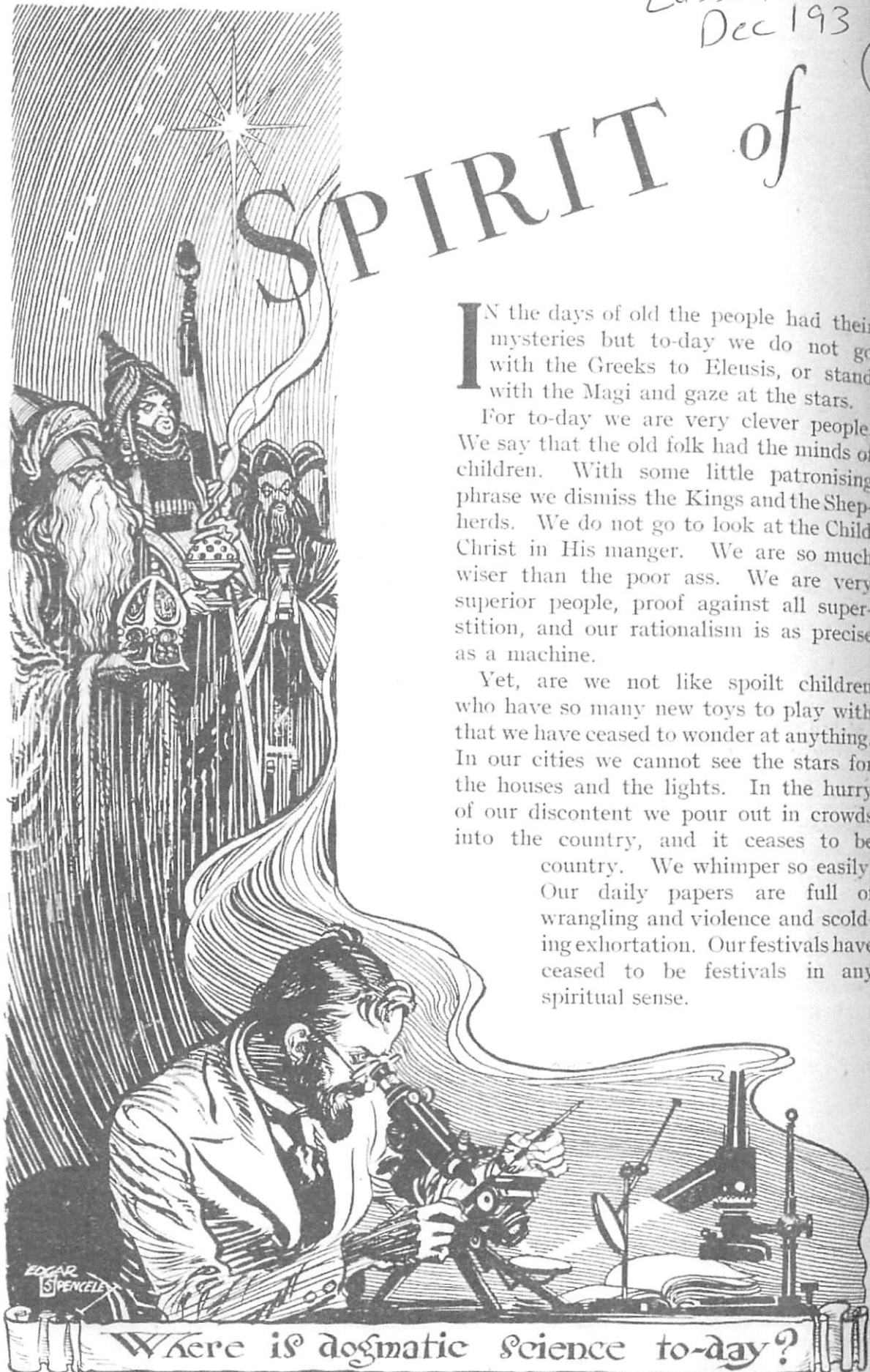
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SPIRIT of

IN the days of old the people had their mysteries but to-day we do not go with the Greeks to Eleusis, or stand with the Magi and gaze at the stars.

For to-day we are very clever people. We say that the old folk had the minds of children. With some little patronising phrase we dismiss the Kings and the Shepherds. We do not go to look at the Child Christ in His manger. We are so much wiser than the poor ass. We are very superior people, proof against all superstition, and our rationalism is as precise as a machine.

Yet, are we not like spoilt children who have so many new toys to play with that we have ceased to wonder at anything. In our cities we cannot see the stars for the houses and the lights. In the hurry of our discontent we pour out in crowds into the country, and it ceases to be country. We whimper so easily. Our daily papers are full of wrangling and violence and scolding exhortation. Our festivals have ceased to be festivals in any spiritual sense.



CHRISTMAS

A famous novelist Appeals
to MEN and WOMEN
of Goodwill to see
CHRISTMAS with its
REAL MEANING—a
Guidance back to FAITH.



Warwick DEEPING

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow the tax-gatherer comes."

Is not the vanishing of belief the tragedy of our generation? We have lost our faith and our feeling for the essential mystery of life. We cannot dream and in dreaming penetrate to or divine the beyondness of reality. Christ hangs dead on the Cross. The tears of a few foolish women have been dried with the dust of history. We look eagerly and with secret yearning to the little cold and clever face of Science. We ask for the blood and the bread, and our cleverness gives us an hypothesis or a formula.

We are disillusioned people, fooled by appearances, fingering the surface of things. We worship the machine and, though the machine can be beautiful, it is but an illusion that the machine can set us free. Misunderstood, it but hastens the hurry of our discontent. When—with it—we reach the end of our illusion we shall find ourselves back in the profundities, on the edge of the deep, mysterious sea, confronted with the secret of self.

But are we so faithless? Are we not

obsessed by the tragic self-consciousness of our own cleverness? We have been like children at school, sitting awed in the presence of that pedagogue Science, the science of the physical dogmatists. We have not dared to open our mouths and utter some of the old mysterious words, for our master would have looked at us with cold contempt.

"Smith minor, don't be silly."

We have been so afraid of appearing sentimental, superstitious, out-of-date. To be out-of-date is to be dead—socially and scientifically. We have become nicely instructed little highbrow snobs. We have kow-towed to the superior people.

But where is dogmatic science to-day? Our schoolmaster shrugs his shoulders. He still uses solemn words—"Relativity"—"Emergence"—the "Quantum"—"Wholeism" and almost it is the jargon of the priest. For our schoolmaster has lost a little of his grim assurance; he is not all Adam's apple, spectacles and infallibility; he is more human. Almost, some of him might be included among the mystics.

One reflects upon our bitter discontent, our crowded haste, this modern picture-show where everything is exaggerated and unreal. Are not the hearts of the people sad? Their political prophets have preached to them a social materialism, a system of social selfishness dressed up in a false humanism. "Go to, now, let us spoil the rich and the successful," and like the grapes of Tantalus, the plunder swings out of reach. And, were all the material accessories theirs, the people would still be spiritually hungry.

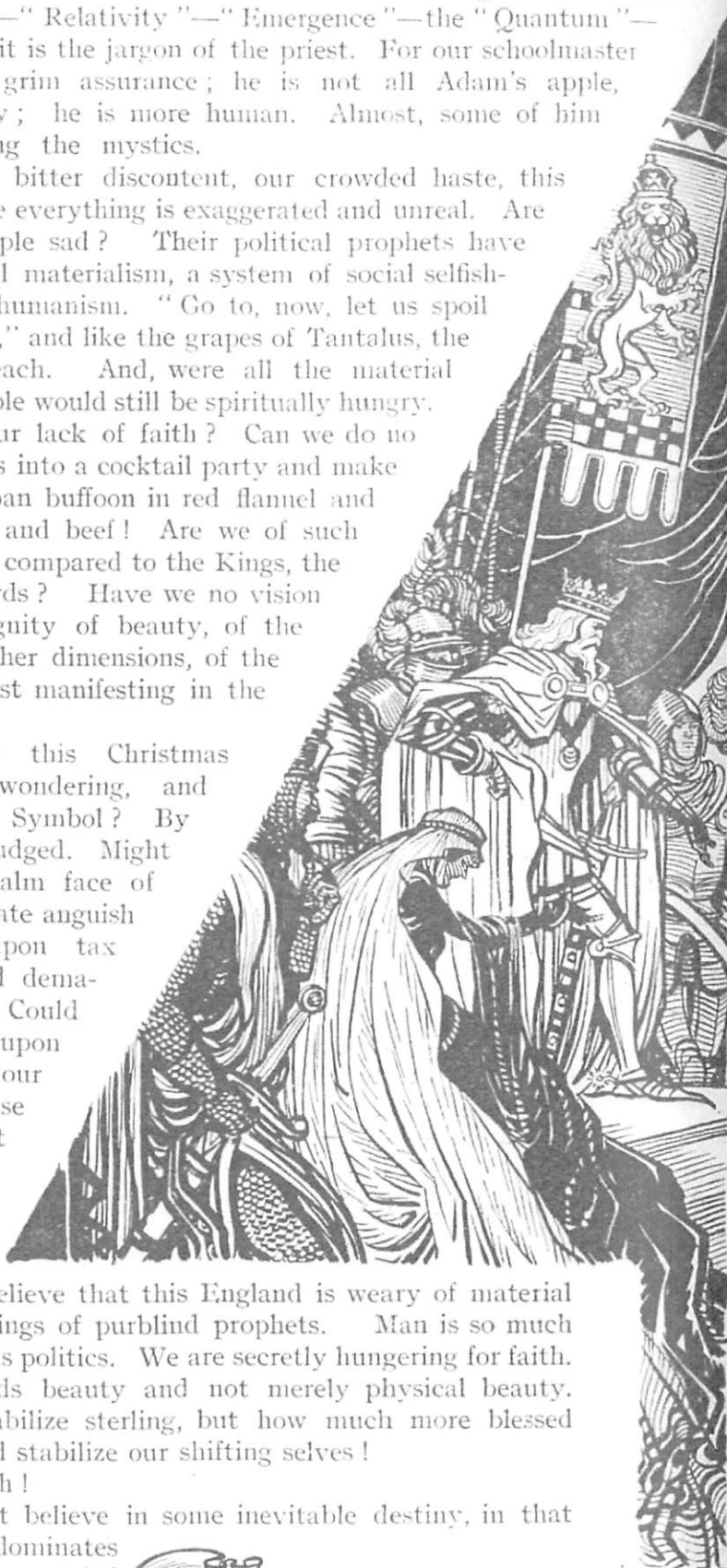
Are we content with our lack of faith? Can we do no better than turn Christmas into a cocktail party and make of Christ a kind of suburban buffoon in red flannel and cotton wool? Mere beer and beef! Are we of such poor stuff spiritually when compared to the Kings, the Wise men and the Shepherds? Have we no vision of beauty and of the dignity of beauty, of the mystical beyondness of other dimensions, of the Soul of the Unknown Artist manifesting in the very essence of things?

Could we not make this Christmas different by pausing, wondering, and reflecting? What is our Symbol? By his symbol shall man be judged. Might we not gaze upon the calm face of Bhudda or the compassionate anguish of Christ, instead of upon tax gatherers and clowns and demagogues on soap-boxes? Could we not light other fires upon our hearths and stuff our stocking with something else than straw? Could we not listen to the voices of the strange singers who still sing or those of us who have the ears to hear?

I do believe it. I do believe that this England is weary of material selfishness and the mouthings of purblind prophets. Man is so much better than his press and his politics. We are secretly hungering for faith. There is a groping towards beauty and not merely physical beauty. We have struggled to stabilize sterling, but how much more blessed we should be if we could stabilize our shifting selves!

If we were rooted in faith!

Why is it that we cannot believe in some inevitable destiny, in that mystical power that dominates matter? Is it that we are palsied with a false self-consciousness which cannot escape into the larger



Why is man compassionate

consciousness? Consciousness of what? Does man ever sit and meditate upon the marvel of his own consciousness? Is not consciousness itself more significant than a multitude of so-called miracles? Why has consciousness come to us? Has it no significance? Does it postulate just a silly, haphazard chance? Or is there meaning behind it? Has it no revealing voice for us?

The revelation of our consciousness!

Why is man compassionate and generous and honest? Why does he feel the inward glow of goodness? Why is he conscious of secret shame when he has done some shameful thing?

Are not these realities in consciousness? As phenomena are they not just as real and far more significant than the uniting of oxygen and hydrogen to form water, or the flexion of light?

A petrol-engine convinces us because it goes. But man goes; his consciousness goes; and that more subtle part of it that we call his soul functions just as convincingly.

Why do we ignore this? Why do we shrug our shoulders and weakly mutter, "O, that's all rot. That's just behaviour. We're superior apes—nothing more."

And if we are superior apes, why so? Is there no significance in the thing? Is there no meaning in it?

Have we just been dragged out of the slime to become Christ or Buddha by a mere fortuitous crowd of circumstances? Is there no symbol for us in the resurrection of consciousness?

Assuredly. To me—and to many of us it is full of infinite meaning. It may be that we do not expect a kind of evangelical being in a flood-lit surplice to appear and draw our attention to the obvious. Does God make Himself obvious in that way? Is not the proof with us, the power to see and to divine, even to dream ourselves into those other dimensions in which He must manifest.

Might He not say to us, "I have given you eyes to behold many marvels. Ye are fools if you do not use them."

What did our fathers and our forefathers celebrate at Christmas?

The birth of Christ. Yes, but much more than that. The figure upon the Cross was a newsymbol. In its naked anguish upon Calvary it was like a crack of light in the dark sky of an old world. Through it blazed other revelations, a new comprehension of the consciousness in man, the evolution of his compassion, of his spiritual possibilities. In the blaze of that light man's consciousness was enlarged. One can understand how Saul of Tarsus saw his God. Henceforward man, while remaining the brother of the beasts, would draw yet nearer towards the Unknown

Artist, who—making music like some invisible Pied Piper—lures man on.

What of this Christmas of ours? The world is in travail. It is passing

and generous and honest?



through one of those periods when materialism fails it. We are conscious of being poor and we are poor because we have lived too much with the Money Changers in the Temple. Like spoilt children we are ready to howl when our toys are taken away. Never was England so full of self-pity. But how rich could we this Christmas be were we to pause and turn aside and lift up our eyes to other things.

Had we the courage and the faith, the will to stand aside from the scramble of sensationalism and see what Kings and Shepherd saw with the eyes of their generation!

Why should we not have the courage and the faith? Was the martyr going to the flames no more than an obstinate egoist? Have all our seers been nothing but self-advertising fools? What was the consciousness of Neanderthal man compared with our consciousness? It was but a brass cymbal as compared with a violin. Why—music—why poetry, why the loveliness of colour? Do all these things arrive like beans picked blindly out of a bag.

Why is there music in the soul of man?

What implications are there here—what challenges to the god in man's consciousness? That other presence beyond the veil, uttering things of mystic meaning, and man with his ear to some crevice, listening. Music. Why the beautiful

order and symmetry and sweetness of such sounds? Just haphazard vibrations in the brain of the musician?

Is it quite credible? When the mechanists ask us to swallow their mechanistic theory they are asking us to do that which seems to me preposterous. If they postulate blind chance, I prefer to postulate God. Their blind boiling-up of circumstance is harder to swallow than the conception of an immanent intelligence. They show us a table laid and a dinner exquisitely cooked and—when we propose to send our thanks to the cook—they answer with little glib, cold faces: "There isn't any cook. The thing cooked itself."

It does not convince me. I prefer to believe in the existence of the cook.

Well might God say to us, "O ye of little faith." Can we not turn this Christmas from our materialism, our wranglings and self-pities and suffer another spirit to be reborn in us? Surely. We speak of an act of faith, and faith can be just as active and positive as any other force. We are weak because we do not will. If I say "I believe," already I am on the way to believing. Does not the Unknown Artist dare us to the adventure, not a mere pottering among the flesh pots, but the adventure that lit up the hearts and



the lives of all those great ones who did not crawl upon their bellies.

Let something be reborn in us this Christmas. Let us search our souls and have courage and in courage win back to faith. Let us cease from our cynicisms, our flippancies and our whimperings that man is the most miserable of creatures because he can comprehend his own futility.

There is so much more to be comprehended, so much more to be divined. Man's very consciousness is—to me the proof of that other immanent consciousness.

Why should not each of us say this Christmas, "I will be reborn. I will be one of those blessed ones who raised a standard and cried, 'Courage, let us go forward in faith.' I will dare to believe. I will dare to be other than I am."

There would come to many of us that peace that passeth understanding, the peace that comes to us sometimes in our gardens when we forget our smaller selves. Our eyes seem to see more than flowers, sunlight, shadows, grass. It is as though the painted veil became strangely transparent and the world of the beyond showed through the mere pattern of the senses. Some other spirit walks with us in the garden. Almost, our eyes see and our ears hear. The spirit in us divines the nearness of that other Spirit.

Illustrated by
Edgar SPENCELEY

